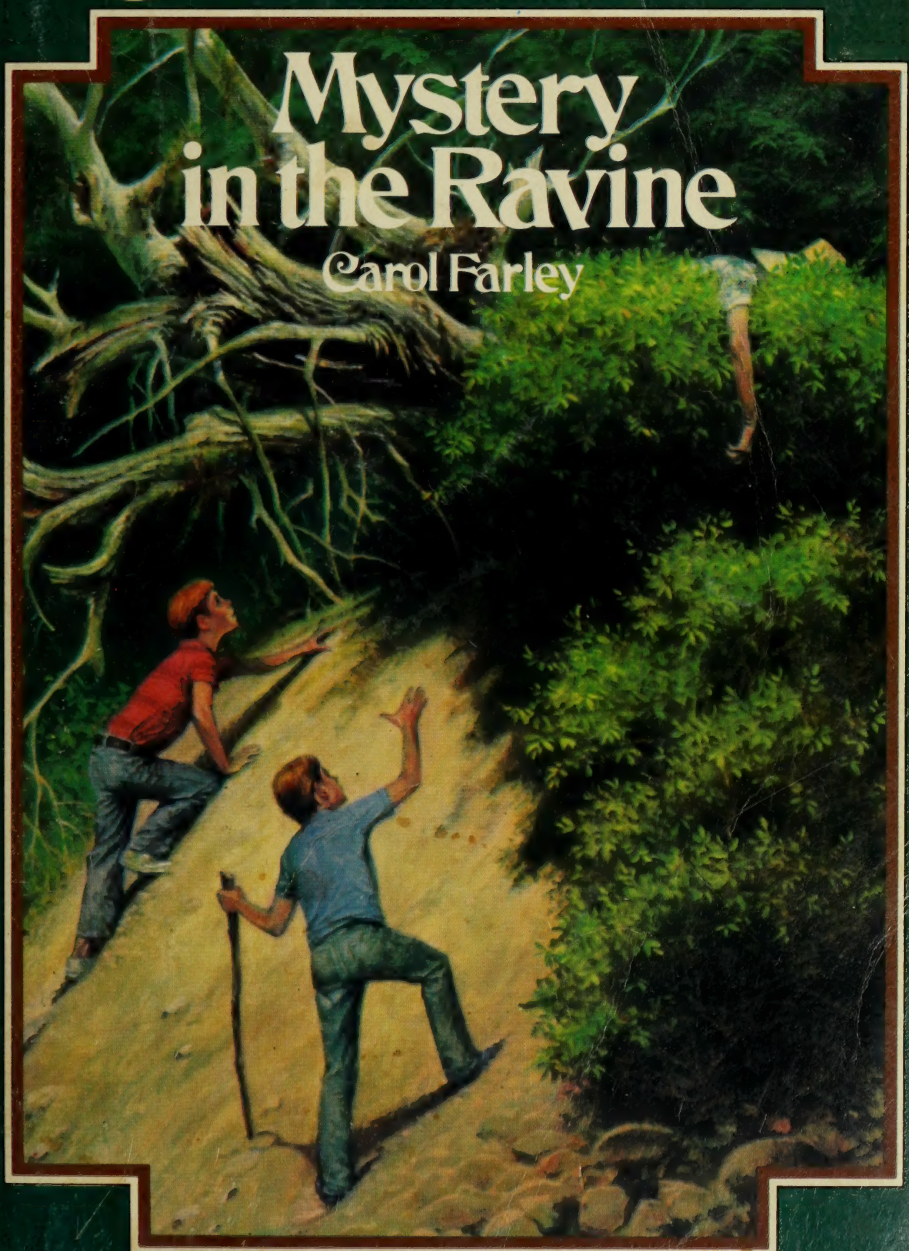
AVON CAMELOT

A disappearing body...
fake archaeologists...
hidden money...and a witch!

$1.95
60558

Mystery in the Ravine

Carol Farley



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012

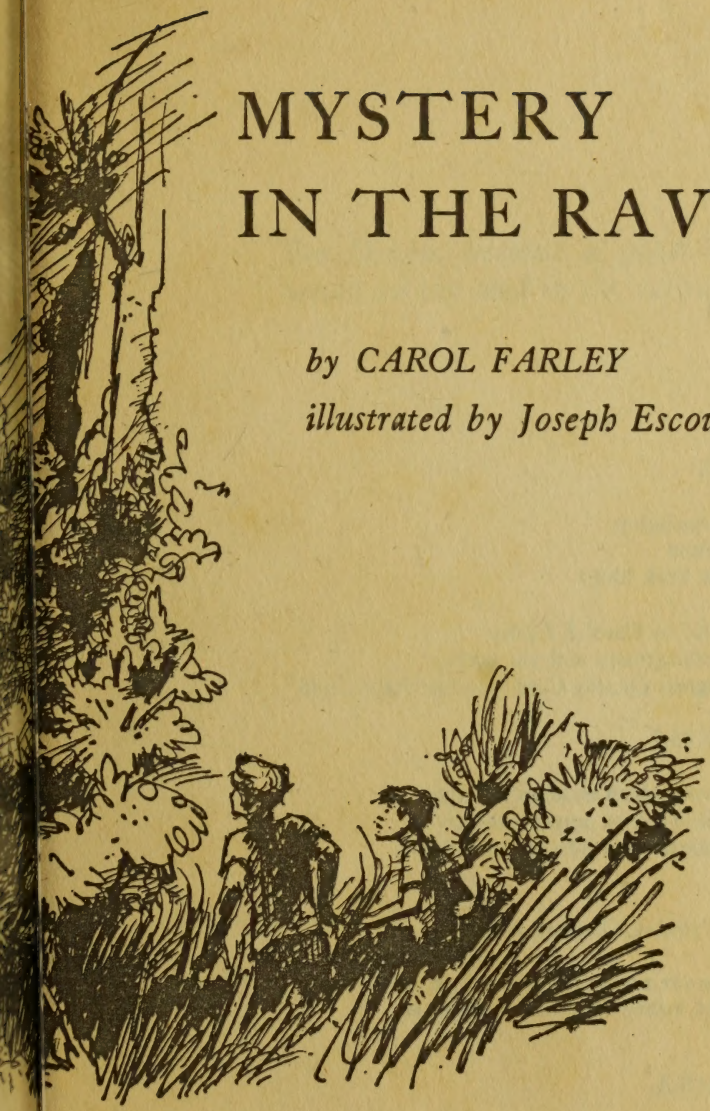
http://archive.org/details/mysteryinravine00farl

Mystery in the Ravine

MYSTERY IN THE RAVINE

by CAROL FARLEY

illustrated by Joseph Escourido



AN AVON CAMELOT BOOK

AVON BOOKS
A division of
The Hearst Corporation
959 Eighth Avenue
New York, New York 10019

Copyright © 1967 by Carol J. Farley
Published by arrangement with the author.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: AC6-10135

ISBN: 0-380-00745-2

All rights reserved, which includes the right
to reproduce this book or portions thereof in
any form whatsoever. For information address
Avon Books.

First Camelot Printing, October, 1976

CAMELOT TRADEMARK REG. U. S. PAT. OFF. AND IN
OTHER COUNTRIES, MARCA REGISTRADA, HECHO EN
U.S.A.

Printed in the U.S.A.

BAN 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

For Dennis, because of what he wrote on the sand in the canyon.

Mystery in the Ravine

Other Mysteries Available
From Avon Camelot Books:

MYSTERY OF THE FOG MAN
BY CAROL FARLEY

And by Wylly Folk St. John

THE SECRETS OF HIDDEN CREEK
THE SECRET OF THE SEVEN CROWS
THE SECRETS OF THE PIRATE INN
THE CHRISTMAS TREE MYSTERY

CHAPTER ONE

Sometimes, when something is really awful, you just can't stop looking at it. I don't know why that is true, but I know that it is. It was true the day when I stood on a high cliff near Ludington, and stared down into a huge, deep canyon. The scene was like a nightmare, all tangled and pointless and full of weird confusion, but I could not take my eyes away. What it was that bothered me, I still cannot say, but I felt a strange fear overpower me as I peered down at the open earth.

"Well, Kipper, there it is—Dixon Canyon."

My cousin's voice seemed too loud in the eerie stillness. I looked back to where he sat leaning against a large tree. He brushed his red hair from his eyes, then picked up a stone and threw it past me, out over the canyon. It sailed through empty air, then suddenly dropped down into the darkness of the treetops far below. I felt myself back away a few more steps from the rim of the ravine.

"It's a long way down, all right," Larry said, laughing. He walked to my side and together we stared at the bushes, the trees, the weird vegetation. We smelled the wet air of Lake Michigan and we heard the whisper of the waves as they touched the beach below, but

I thought only of the darkness of the ravine: anything could lie hidden in the thick debris before us.

"I wonder what's down there," I said at last. "Isn't it funny that there isn't any noise? Don't animals live around here?"

"Chipmunks, maybe, or squirrels. It isn't like a regular forest, you know, Kip. It's mostly just sand. What'd you think would be down there?"

"Oh, nothing, I guess." I knew I could never explain my real feelings. Larry doesn't like to talk about things that he can't see. "It's just that when I look down there I get a funny feeling."

"A funny feeling!" Larry's freckled face broke into a wide grin. "Seems to me that those funny feelings of yours always get us into trouble."

I smiled without answering, for both of us knew that it was Larry and his crazy ideas that caused our adventures. He and his dad lived alone in the small city of Ludington; a visit with them meant excitement for me. We were nearly the same age, but otherwise we were completely different. Lots of times I envied Larry because nothing ever seemed to bother him. After being with him a while, I could almost forget how shy I was, how quick I was to stammer, and how slow I was to do anything new. I was glad I was spending two weeks with him.

"But I admit this place *is* sort of strange," Larry went on. "Nobody even knows how it got here. The land washed out about forty years ago. One day it was a straight cliffside; the next day it was a huge canyon."

"You mean all that land just disappeared? How could that happen?"

"That's what everybody asked. The road commission had built a highway along here—they thought the land was completely solid. Nobody knows what caused the collapse. There was a bad storm the night that the cliff caved in; by morning, there was only a big hole out here. Almost everything washed into Lake Michigan."

"If there had been houses?"

"They would have gone down, too." Larry's voice became almost hushed. "The trees, the land, the road —it all went down."

I swallowed loudly and looked around. The land seemed firm enough where we stood. There were even two cottages built behind a fence that separated the public area from the private land. They perched a few yards back from the north side of the three-sided canyon, and that part looked most treacherous of all. It was covered with sand and bushes near the top; then halfway down I saw a long ledge sticking out from the cliffside, covered with thick foliage. A tree, caught by its roots, lay brown and lifeless among the wild, green growth.

"Some people call this place Horse Canyon," Larry was saying. "It's sort of shaped like a horseshoe."

I hardly heard him. My strange fear had grown larger after Larry had told me how the ravine had formed. I wanted to leave, yet I was determined to see everything.

"Have you ever gone down there exploring?" I finally asked.

Larry's eyes followed the outline of the fence. "Can't. The public can only come here for the view. The land around the canyon is all private. And besides, you can't get down into the ravine from up here—the sides are too steep. People say somebody got killed trying to go down from the top—the sand caved in on him."

I looked past the fence on the north. The land sloped more gradually there. The steep cliff became a long, deep hill, much clearer than the land on the south. I nodded my head in the direction of the cottages. "How about behind there? Couldn't we use the hill just to get down to the beach?"

Larry frowned. "What's so important about getting down there, anyway?"

"I just thought it might be fun," I answered, throwing a stick out over the canyon. "We rode our bikes all the way out here; I thought it would be fun to see it all."

"But there's nothing down there that you can't see from up here. It's just sand, trees, and bushes."

"Okay. Okay, then." I walked back to the big tree and sat down. I had known Larry long enough to realize that the only way I could get him interested in anything was to pretend that I didn't care much about it myself. He always likes to feel that he thinks of everything first.

He walked over and sat down beside me, stretching

out his long legs. They made my legs look even shorter, just as his red hair made my brown hair seem even duller. I had the feeling that in a picture negative of us, Larry's image would be sharp and clear, whereas mine would be blurred and faded.

He sat up suddenly. "Maybe you had a good idea at that, Kip. It might be kind of fun to go down into the canyon."

"Sure it would!" I rose and pointed to the sloping hill. "Let's use the yard behind the cottages. Once we get to the beach, we can walk right into the ravine."

Larry squinted his eyes and looked embarrassed. "That would be trespassing, you know."

I hadn't quite thought of it in that way. "Trespassing?"

"Yes." He looked away from me, out at the lake. "If anybody else did it, it probably wouldn't matter, but just because my dad is chief of police in Ludington, I'd get caught."

"Well, couldn't you ask the owner if we could just use the yard?"

A strange look came over his face. "I wouldn't have the nerve," he said.

I felt my mouth open in surprise. What could ever be bad enough to worry Larry? "Why not?" I asked. "Doesn't he live out here all the time?"

"*She* sure does."

"A woman!" I looked again at the desolate scene. The canyon was six miles from Ludington, a mile from the nearest store. "She live out here all alone?"

Larry nodded. "She's owned all this land for years, but everybody still calls it Dixon Canyon because the Dixons were the first owners. Mrs. Danbury was the one who built the cottages, though. She lives in one and rents the other to tourists."

"Well, all we want to do is borrow her yard for a few minutes. She wouldn't mind that, would she?"

"That's what you think! If she saw us, she'd have us arrested."

I started to laugh, but Larry stopped me.

"You don't know Mrs. Danbury. She's a holy terror. Walks all the way into Ludington every week, and every week she has something new to complain about. One time she took on the whole post office—said the mailman kept her pension checks so they didn't get to her soon enough."

"Pension checks? My gosh, how old is she?"

Larry laughed. "You won't believe this, Kipper. She must be over seventy."

"You're kidding!"

"With Mrs. Danbury, age doesn't mean anything. She's tougher, stronger, and louder than any two men you could name. She's shaped like a baseball bat, and I have a feeling she could make a foul ball out of anybody."

I felt a surge of surprise that an old woman could have so much of Larry's respect. "Where'd she come from?"

"She's been here longer than Dad or I have, I'm sure, but other people say she came to Ludington

around 1955. Nobody knows her very well—she doesn't have any real friends."

"I'd like to see her!"

"She's not much when you just look at her, Kip. She's a tall, skinny old woman—wears a big bonnet and a long skirt most of the time—looks like she came here in a covered wagon. You'll probably see her in town one day."

"You sure have a lot of characters around here, Larry."

"No more than on the farms around where you live. People are just the same everywhere, but in a small town we put them under a magnifying glass." He looked toward the cottages, and the smile suddenly left his face. "Somebody is opening the door. You might get to see old Danbury right now," he whispered.

I turned to watch, staring unashamedly, forgetting my shyness in my haste to see a real, live holy terror.

CHAPTER TWO

Somewhere I read that the unexpected is always frightening, no matter what it is. Even a funny clown is scary if you suddenly find him staring in your living room window. That's how it was when I watched the door of the cottage slowly open. I expected to see a woman—a strange woman, I admit, but still, a woman. As it was, a man walked out—a common-looking, seemingly average man, but I felt myself stiffen with fear.

I know you really shouldn't judge people the first time you see them, but I always do it anyway. Actually, the first time is the only time you really see them, so maybe you're a better judge then. After you know someone well, your eyes only see what your brain tells them to see.

I saw immediately that the man on the steps was too much of everything—too heavy, too bald, too flushed. His shirt was too bright; his eyes were too small. Even his smile, stretched tight across his face, was too large to be real.

He turned toward the fence that separated us, wiping his face with a large handkerchief as he walked. "You boys lost?" His voice was high and shrill.

"No." Larry moved closer to the fence. "We thought we'd explore Dixon Canyon. We rode our bikes out here from Ludington, and now we're trying to figure out how to get down into the ravine for a hike. The sides up here are too steep to use."

The man paused at the fence. "It's a long drop, that's for sure." He looked toward the canyon, then turned back to us. "I haven't been down there myself yet. We just moved in, haven't seen much of anything. It's pretty deserted out this way."

"You've probably seen Mrs. Danbury though."

"She that old woman with the bonnet?"

"She owns the land."

"Must be the one, then. My partner handled all that sort of business when we came yesterday. He said she wore an old-fashioned bonnet."

Larry narrowed his eyes. "Funny you haven't seen her. She hardly ever goes anyplace."

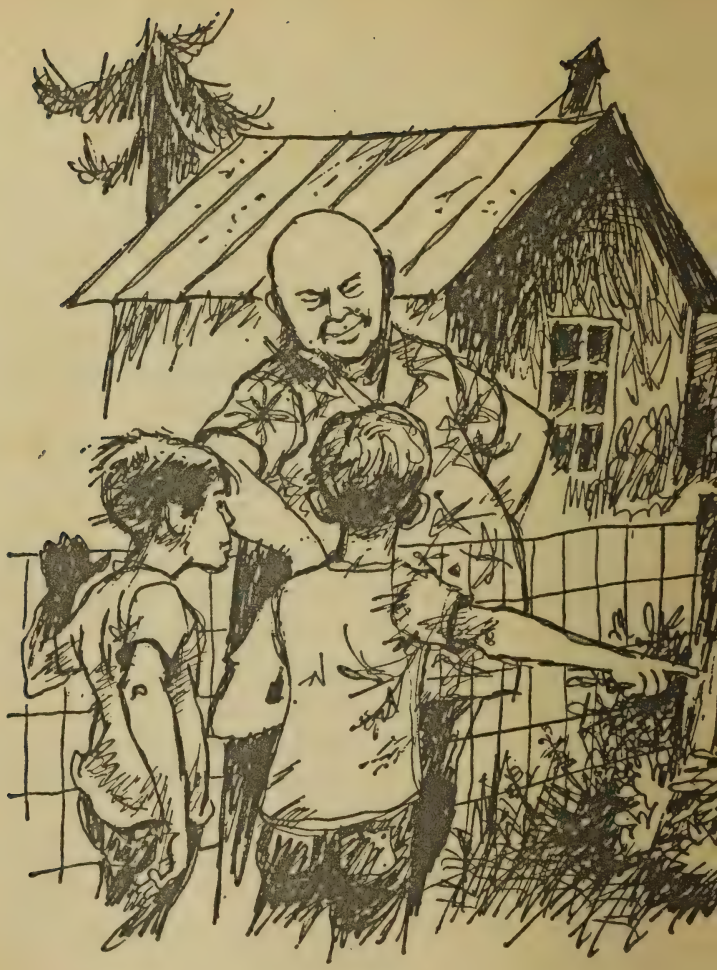
The man wiped his red face again. "You never know what women are going to do," he said. "Maybe she went into town."

For a moment there was an awkward silence. Then the man spoke again, and now his voice was firmer, deeper. "Why not forget about going down into that ravine. There's nothing down there."

"We just want to hike," Larry said.

The man frowned. "But you can't get down there." He spoke harshly, his voice too loud.

"We'll figure out a way to do it," Larry answered slowly. "Come on, Kip, let's hike up the road and find



another way down." He grabbed my arm and half-pulled me away.

"Wait!"

The stranger took a few steps nearer to us. "There's

a hill behind this cottage. I guess there's some sort of path through the trees—not easy to use, but better than the cliffside." He shrugged his rounded shoulders. "I've been wanting to get down to the beach

myself. Maybe the three of us could go down together." He put out his hand over the top of the fence. "My name's Marvin Kreebs."

Larry turned to look back at me, winked, and started forward. "Thanks a lot, Mr. Kreebs," he said, shaking hands. "I'm Larry Levitt and this is my cousin, Christopher. You here on a vacation?"

Mr. Kreebs started to nod, then stopped. "Well, not really," he said quickly. "My partner and I have work to do here."

Larry stared curiously. Neither of us spoke.

"We're studying Indian lore," Mr. Kreebs said. "For a university. We'll probably be digging a bit. Looking for pottery and things from Michigan tribes."

"You're studying the Mohawks, you mean?" Larry asked.

Mr. Kreebs nodded. "We want to find samples of their handicraft." He gave us a wide smile and patted Larry's shoulder. "You boys wait here a few minutes while I close up the cottage. My partner went to Ludington for some supplies."

"Some deal, huh?" Larry whispered, the minute the door closed behind Mr. Kreebs.

"What's with him?" I asked quickly. "How come he's so interested in us?"

Larry smiled. "What do you care? We're getting down into the ravine, aren't we? And we wanted to, didn't we?"

I nodded, trying to ignore my doubts. "But you have to admit that there's something odd about that

guy, Larry. He's too friendly or something. Maybe he's lived too long with Indian books and pottery."

"He doesn't know anything about Indians."

I looked at Larry quickly to see whether he was joking, but I could see that he was not. "How can you say that? He just told us—"

"He just told us that he doesn't know anything about Indians." Larry smiled and lowered his voice. "I know quite a bit about them. Only a few tribes lived in this area: the Potawatomi mostly, and some Chippewa and Ottawa. The Mohawks were never around here. That's why I asked the question the way I did. Our Mr. Kreebs acted so funny that I had to find out if he really knew what he was talking about."

Leave it to Larry to set a trap like that! Questions collided in my head. "Then why would he—" I stopped. Mr. Kreebs, his head covered with a red golf hat that perched on top like an embarrassed toupee, came walking from the cottage.

When we started down the hill, my strange feeling about that ravine began all over again. I wanted to get down the hill, wanted to explore, but another part of me was afraid of what I might find. When you have two different desires, how do you know which one to follow? I guess it's easier to do what the others do, but is that always the better way? I had no time to think. I turned and followed Larry.

He and Mr. Kreebs hurried on ahead of me. I watched them carelessly begin the tramp through the bushes down the hillside to the forest. They wasted

no time dreaming of hidden dangers. I tried to act as they did, tried to hurry past the dense foliage, tried to ignore the strange shapes on all sides, but I failed in everything. I had to see, really see, and I could not forget my strange fear that something, somewhere, lay hidden in the darkness of the canyon.

The path curved down the hill, not touching the steep side of the ravine on our left. On top of the hill, the path had seemed clear, but now that we were on it, I saw that it was almost as bad as the surroundings. I guess it had not been used for years, because the path grew worse the farther we went. It twisted down the hill like a frayed and worn rope, winding around the trees and through the thick foliage, sometimes clear, sometimes almost nonexistent.

Noises came from everywhere. It was strange: when we had sat on top of the ravine everything was silent; now that we were almost in it, sounds came from all sides. The birds were screaming and the leaves rustled above our heads. Water splashed somewhere in the thickets, and we could hear the waves from Lake Michigan. Insects buzzed around our faces, and we kept brushing them away.

Twice we came to a clearing, where we saw the far side of the ravine on our left. I saw trees that had fallen over. They had not crashed to the bottom, but were clinging to the hillside with their roots, their skeletons hanging out into the air like unfinished bridges. Larry pointed to an ancient-looking trunk that stuck out like an accusing finger. He said an

eagle made a nest on the very end of it and returned year after year.

I wanted to study everything, wanted to investigate all we saw, but Mr. Kreebs made it impossible. He was continually turning back. "Coming?" he would say in that high voice with that false smile. And I would nod and hurry along. He was panting louder as we went down, and he swore softly when he stumbled. His swearing seemed more sincere than his smile, though, so I could forgive him for that.

Then at last we reached the bottom, and Lake Michigan lay directly in front of us, blue and always moving. Larry and I fell to the beach, and Mr. Kreebs collapsed on a fallen tree trunk.

We sat in panting silence for a few seconds, too tired to speak. Mr. Kreebs took off his hat, and wiped his gleaming face.

"Think you'll make this trip often?" Larry asked him.

"Not if I can help it."

For a split second, he seemed to shed his falseness—he seemed to be someone else, someone who, though not so nice, was absolutely honest. Then he put on his false mask again and smiled. "Jerome and I will have to come down often, of course," he said. "Maybe we'll get used to it after a while."

Larry moaned. "What a trip, huh, Kip? And think of climbing back up there again!"

"I'd rather not," I said. "It's a lot tougher than it looks."

Mr. Kreebs sighed and put his hat back on. "Think I'll go ahead. I'm anxious to see that ravine."

"What do you think?" Larry whispered, when the man had walked away.

I gave him a quick glance. "Why would he lie?" I asked. "I can't figure it out."

"You boys coming?"

Larry and I looked up guiltily. Isn't it queer that truth can make you feel so guilty? Mr. Kreebs stood looking back at us, waiting near the mouth of the canyon.

"We're coming," Larry called.

"I just wanted you to see what you did all that work for," Mr. Kreebs told us. "There isn't anything worth looking at in there."

Larry and I walked past him into the canyon. At first we only stood and stared. The ground was so covered with foliage that it was impossible to see the earth. We walked ahead through the bushes, along the north side of the canyon. Mr. Kreebs paused near the mouth of the ravine. He began to examine the earth behind a tree, crouching down like a huge, scarlet-topped toad.

As we walked, Larry and I heard small animals scurry ahead of us. There was a damp, black, earthy smell. We kept looking up at the tall cliffs surrounding us. I was fascinated by the towering north side of the canyon. From the beach, I could see that the wall was crumbling and caved in. I saw the ledge sticking out over our heads. I don't know how long we walked,

how many things we picked up. We went from one side to the other. Everywhere we looked we saw green —everywhere except . . .

"Larry! What's that?" I pointed up to the north side of the canyon. From where we stood, the entire ledge was visible and through the bushes and the dead tree branches lying there, I could plainly see traces of bright color.

"It looks like cloth," Larry said. "Like blue and yellow cloth."

"Was it there before? Or didn't we notice it? And how could cloth get there?"

Larry acted as though he hadn't heard me. "Mrs. Danbury always wears a long blue skirt," he was saying, "and that bonnet she wears is yellow."

I stared back at the ledge again. It was far up over our heads. "Mrs. Danbury? Do you think it might be her up there? Do you think she fell over the cliff edge and landed there?"

Larry was running across the canyon even before I finished. "Mrs. Danbury!" he shouted, flinging himself up the cliffside. He slid back down in the loose sand, still shouting out her name. "I know she's there," he said to me. "Those are the clothes she wears."

"Maybe she can't hear us, Larry."

"We've got to get up there," Larry answered, trying to climb the hill again. "I'm sure it must be Mrs. Danbury. Go get Mr. Kreebs; I'll try to climb up to her somehow."

I turned around and ran back to the mouth of the

canyon, back to the strange man who told even stranger lies. I ran eagerly ahead, looking up and down the beach, shouting out his name.

He wasn't there.

CHAPTER THREE

"Gone? How could he be gone? He was just here." Larry was full of sand. He looked hot and tired.

I felt like a centipede without legs. "I don't know what happened to him. I searched half the beach. What'll we do now?"

Larry shook his head. "I don't know what to do. I can only get a little ways up there, then I slide back down. There isn't anything to grab here at the bottom to help you climb."

"Can we reach her from the top?"

"I don't think we can do much of anything by ourselves." Larry stared up at the ledge. "I don't think she's moved—can't tell how long she's been up there."

"You really think she fell over?"

"That's for Dad to find out—it's a sure thing that we can't do it alone. I think it's Mrs. Danbury all right. Old Kreebs sure picked a fine time to disappear." Larry tried to brush the sand from his jeans. "We'll have to call Dad ourselves. Let's get moving. It'll take forever to get to the top again, and we sure can't do anything from down here."

We ran from the canyon onto the beach and started

up the path. Mr. Kreebs was nowhere in sight. At first we looked for him, called to him, but soon, as we climbed higher and higher, we had all we could do just to take care of ourselves. That hill seemed to grow higher as we moved. My legs ached, my arms hurt, even my chest ached when I took a deep breath. Has it ever hurt you to breathe—even when you're dying for air? It feels like iron bands around your chest slowly getting tighter.

Sweat poured from my forehead. Larry's face was so red that he was nearly purple. Panting and puffing, we would turn a bend only to find still another bend. We had started by running, then had begun walking, and finally we were crawling. It was a nightmare—a nightmare in green.

And then at last we reached the top. We fell on the grass and tried to breathe. The cottage stood only a few yards in front of us, but even to move that distance seemed torture.

"Something wrong?"

Mr. Kreebs stood beside us—fat, false Mr. Kreebs with an untroubled face.

"Where were you?" Larry asked. He tried to sit up, as his words came out in gasps.

"Why, right here," Kreebs answered, looking surprised. "I decided to come up and get some tools."

"Mrs. Danbury's down there," I panted.

"Mrs. Danbury? You mean the woman who owns this land?"

"Owned it," Larry corrected. "We think she must

be dead. We saw her wedged against a tree on the north side on that ledge. You can't see it from the top, but we saw it when we looked up there from the beach."

The fat face grew pale. The small mouth formed a circle. "Are you sure?"

"It must be Mrs. Danbury," Larry answered. "Or someone wearing clothes like hers."

"We'll have to call for help," I said.

Mr. Kreebs hesitated. He ran his left hand over his bald head. "There's a telephone in there," he said slowly.

"I'll call my dad." Larry ran ahead, and Mr. Kreebs turned and followed. They went into the cottage.

I lay sprawled on the ground in the sudden silence. So there had been something in that ravine—but how had I known? Had there been a noise, a movement? I walked nearer to the cliff edge, afraid the land would break away, but eager, still, to see. Teetering on my hands and knees, I stared down the straight dropoff. Bushes, sticks, treetops, tree roots hanging out in midair . . . I could see nothing else. There was no sign of what lay below. The ledge was hidden by the shrubs above it. I looked back at Mrs. Danbury's cottage, desolate in the bright sunshine, and I felt all churned up inside.

"They'll be right out!" Larry shouted from the other cottage. He saw me sitting near the edge. "Can you see anything from up here?"

"No. The bushes hide the ledge." I backed up to

firmer ground. "How'll they ever get her up here?"

"They'll probably have to use ropes," Larry said. "Dad said he'd bring Lew Kenner with him. Three men should be able to do it all right."

"Three?"

"Sure—Mr. Kreebs will help." Larry turned quickly to look back at the cottage. "He's all shook up—feels like he shouldn't have left us down there alone, I guess."

"He sure made it up the hill in a hurry," I said. "Funny he left without saying anything to us."

Larry nodded. "He's a weird one all right. But just think of our finding her like that!" He walked along the top, trying to see over the caved-in side. But I knew he would see only bushes and leaves. That's about all you could see except from the canyon floor.

A few minutes later we heard the siren. Mr. Kreebs and Larry waved the police car in beside the fence. I watched Uncle Matt climb from the driver's seat.

He was tall, but not heavy. At night in the house, in his robe, he seemed like all the other middle-aged men I've met; but in his uniform he seemed taller, stronger.

"I'm Chief Levitt," he was saying to Mr. Kreebs. "I hear you have some trouble out here."

Mr. Kreebs smiled weakly. He had left his hat inside, and now he wiped his head with his handkerchief. "They're the ones who know," he said. He motioned toward Larry. "Your son and his friend here say they saw something on that ledge."

"You didn't see anything yourself?"

The fat man shook his head, his face flushed. "Should have stayed with them, I guess. We went down the hill together but I came up alone—wanted to get my tools. I'm doing work for a university."

"Anyone else notice anything?"

"Nobody else is here." Mr. Kreebs shrugged his shoulders. "My partner, Jerome Powers, is in town. There isn't anybody else with us."

"I can't see anything from up here," Lew Kenner called. He was standing near the edge of the canyon talking to Larry.

"The boys and I will have to go down there then," Uncle Matt said. "They can show me the place. I'll try to call up to you so we can pinpoint the exact spot. We'll work something out from there. Maybe I can place a marker you can see from up here."

"What about me?" Mr. Kreebs was wiping his face again. He looked warm and unhappy.

"Stick around here, too," Uncle Matt answered. "It's hard to call directions up from that ravine. I've tried it before. The sound doesn't carry very well. If Lew can't hear me, maybe you could move in closer and relay the information. We need to know the exact location."

We started down the hill again, down the twisting path. I forgot the aches in my legs as I hurried behind eagerly. Now the strange shapes were familiar. The turns did not seem as great, for I had met them all before, and once something has been faced, it can never again seem as good, or as bad.

It was a long way down and we half-ran all the way. Why, I don't know, for I was sure that Mrs. Danbury would have answered if she could have heard us. Uncle Matt's uniform was wet. I could see the stains on his shirt grow larger as we hurried down the hill.

Larry ran ahead, waiting impatiently when we lagged too far behind. I stumbled once on a rock, but caught myself on a tree branch. Even in my haste, I wondered at the bushes growing firmly in the sand. They clung like great green squids.

When at last we reached the bottom, we again paused on the beach.

"We went along in there," Larry panted. "From over that way you can see all the north side. You can see all that ledge."

We followed him into the canyon. Everything was very still.

"We were walking along, looking up, I guess. There's a tree halfway up sticking out from that ledge. She's caught in behind there."

We were all running now. We were near the spot.

"There's the ledge!" Larry shouted, pointing.

We stopped and looked up. The ledge was only green. There was no bright color.

"She isn't there!" Larry gasped.

I stared, stupefied. We could see the whole scene plainly. There were only shrubs and bushes. There was nothing else.

CHAPTER FOUR

"If this is a joke, it isn't very funny." Uncle Matt frowned, his mouth a thin straight line. He was standing in the sand, and his uniform was rumpled.

"But we saw the colors right up there!" Larry said. "We could see them through the leaves."

"We did see them, Uncle Matt. We wouldn't joke about something like this," I said.

"What happened then? There isn't a sign of anything up there now."

Larry and I stared at each other. Hadn't we admitted that it was impossible to climb up or down from that ledge? And if it had been Mrs. Danbury and she really had fallen over, how could she be strong enough to move? We could easily see the bottom where we stood—she wasn't at the foot of that cliff and she couldn't possibly have climbed back to the top again.

"Maybe it only looked like a body," Uncle Matt said. "Is that the deal? You got too excited too soon?"

"It *was* a body," Larry answered. "Something screwy is going on around here; bodies don't just get up and fly away."

"But sometimes our imaginations do," Uncle Matt told him. "It's hot today; maybe the heat got to you.

Maybe you just saw a blue paper caught against the bushes up there."

"Oh, Dad!" Larry frowned at his father. "Don't you think we know the difference between a body and a blue paper?"

"But how did she move?" I asked. "And how could she be there a little while ago and be gone now?"

"I don't know," Larry answered. "I sure don't know."

"We'd better check all along the bottom," Uncle Matt said. "Maybe we'll find whatever it was that you saw."

We separated and started pushing away ferns, dead tree branches, bushes. But none of us saw anything that was blue or yellow. I kept looking at that ledge and wondering. Had we only imagined the colors there? But we both had seen the same thing, I told myself. We couldn't both imagine it.

Suddenly, we heard shouts from far away. The voices seemed to echo down the ravine, too hollow to be understood.

"We'll have to go up and explain," Uncle Matt said at last, rubbing his right eye with his palm. "I don't think you really meant this as a joke—we'll just call it a mistake." He sighed and turned. "Come on now, let's get started back up that hill." He sounded forgiving, but I knew he would remember the trouble we had caused. It's a lot easier to forgive than to forget.

It was a quieter group that went back up the hill—quieter and a lot slower, too. Larry dragged behind

this time, and I saw him pause and stare back down the trail now and then. I kept wanting to turn back myself.

The other policeman met us halfway down the path. "Nothing there," Uncle Matt mumbled to him and they walked on ahead. They said nothing to us. I felt like a balloon without air, worthless and foolish. What had really happened back there in the ravine? What had been on that ledge?

Larry reached my side. "He's mad now," he said. "I don't think he believed we really saw anything."

"I guess you can't blame him, Larry. We dragged him all the way down here for nothing; at least he thinks it's for nothing."

"If somebody else had seen that body, he probably would believe it. How come people never believe their relatives?"

I shrugged. "It's not that, Larry. You have to admit it looks funny. We saw something; Mr. Kreebs didn't."

"And that's funny too, if you ask me." Larry grabbed my arm. "What happened to Kreebs? He sure disappeared in a hurry."

"It doesn't matter now, does it? If Mrs. Danbury is alive, we'll see her somewhere and we'll know we were wrong about that body."

"But there was a body there—" Larry paused. "Wasn't there a body there, Kipper?"

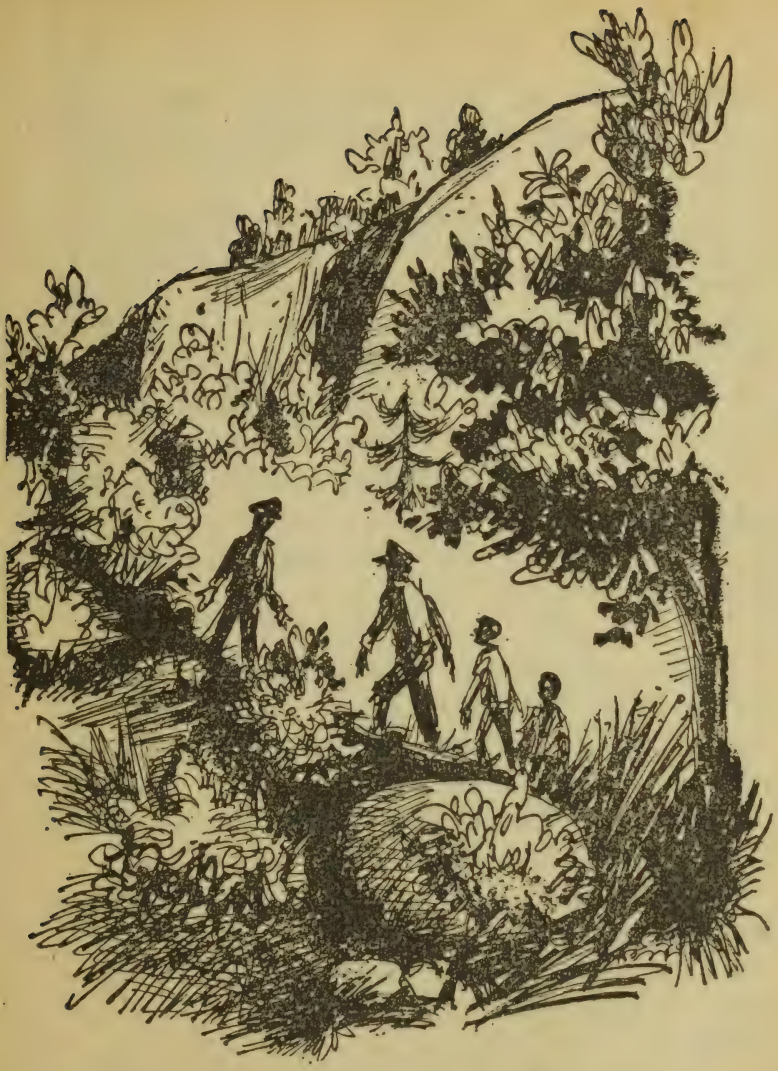
It was strange to have Larry turning to me for reassurance. I tried to keep my voice steady as I answered. "Something was there, all right."

"It's that Kreebs! I knew there was something about him." Larry dropped my arm and walked ahead. Insecurity was such a stranger to him that it never stayed long when it did get near him. "He lied about why he's staying here," Larry went on, "and I know he lied about coming up that hill to get tools."

"But how could he do anything on the cliffside?" I asked. "I don't like him either, but just because you don't like someone, you can't go around blaming him for everything that happens."

Larry mumbled something and we climbed the rest of the hill in silence.

"You boys can ride your bikes to town," Uncle



Matt told us when we reached the top. "You'd better pedal on home now. It's a long way back to Ludington."

"And Mrs. Danbury?" Larry stood near his dad, looking pale and discouraged. Mr. Kreebs stood beside me.

"I checked her cottage. She isn't there, but she might be in town." Uncle Matt put his arm on Larry's shoulders. "I don't think she's in any trouble, son. Things look different in the woods. Lots of people see things that aren't really there—ask any deer hunter. That ledge is so full of bushes and ferns that you couldn't see anything very well."

Larry shrugged, then walked back to Mr. Kreebs and me.

"Quite a fellow," Mr. Kreebs said, as the police car pulled away.

"Who?"

"Why, your father, of course," Mr. Kreebs told Larry. "You had him climb up and down that hill on a wild-goose chase and he hardly raised his voice."

Larry narrowed his eyes. "It wasn't a wild-goose chase. We did see something down there."

Mr. Kreebs chuckled one of those deep-throated sounds that people use when they think they know something that you don't know. "Now just between us men, there wasn't anything on that ledge, was there?"

Larry shifted from one foot to the other. I could see how angry he was.

"Something was there, all right," I said quickly, before he could speak.

"Well, you aren't planning to hang around here any longer, are you?" Mr. Kreebs said, suddenly losing his smile.

"What do you say, Kip?"

"I'd like to get down there again," I answered, watching Kreebs's face. "I'd like to go right now."

"And what if I won't let you use the yard again? It's private here, you know."

"We'll walk into the ravine from up the beach then," Larry told him. "We can walk up a mile from here and get to Lake Michigan. The beach is all public."

Mr. Kreebs smiled with his mouth again. "Now, boys, boys, no need to use that tone of voice. No need to go anywhere else. Of course you can use the yard. Can't think why you'd want to waste all your time going down there again, but go ahead—use the path. You'll see there's nothing to keep you out here. You should be in town having a good time."

Larry and I walked through the gate again, passing in front of Mr. Kreebs. "Thanks," Larry told him stiffly.

"I'll be in the cabin," he called as we started down the hill. "I could never make it down there again. But you won't find any body there, anyway."

"We'll find a body there quicker than he'll find Mohawk pottery," Larry whispered to me as Mr. Kreebs went inside his cottage.

You can do just about anything if you get mad enough. I've had teachers tell me about glands in the body working harder under great emotion, but no

one had to tell me that. I just know that it's true—you really can do a lot more when you're angry.

And Larry and I *were* angry. We stormed down that hill like mongrels leaving a pet show. I don't know what we expected to find. We didn't talk about that. We just knew we had to find something. We hurried along, half-stumbling, turning the bends, panting aloud. Who were they to say we had imagined things? We'd find some proof somehow.

"That Kreebs sure doesn't want us around here," Larry told me when we stopped to rest.

"I thought he'd jump up and down when we said we were staying." I laughed. "He sure was mad."

"But he tries not to show it," Larry said slowly. "And that's what makes it all so queer. Why is he trying to be so friendly?"

"That's what I've been wondering," I answered. "But let's worry about him later. We don't have very much daylight left for exploring that ravine."

We hurried on down the winding path; then finally reached the beach. It was even later than I had thought. The sun was slowly falling into Lake Michigan—day was almost over.

"We'll have to hurry," Larry said, and we ran into the canyon.

Up along the south we went, along the same green path, always looking up. And then the ledge—a bit of blue, a speck of yellow.

"She's there!" Larry gasped.

There wasn't any doubt. At the foot of that tree,

high up on the ledge, the colors showed between the foliage, highlighted by the dying sun.

"I'll climb up there this time!" Larry cried, running to the cliff. He jumped against the side, but his feet dug into sand and he fell back to the ground again.

"You can't climb it, Larry!" I shouted.

"They won't believe us," Larry answered. "We have to get up there to see it for ourselves."

"We can't." I pulled Larry's shirt. "Now listen, I don't know what's going on, but I do know this—that body can't go anywhere if one of us is standing here watching. You go call Uncle Matt. I'll stay here and watch. That's the only way we'll ever find out what's happening."

Larry stopped trying to climb the falling sand. "You'll watch all the time?"

I nodded. Thinking about it now, I wonder what we thought would happen. Could we actually have thought the body could appear and disappear like flowers in a magician's hand? I guess that things only seem impossible at certain times—at that moment we believed that anything could happen.

"Okay. I'll run back up to Kreebs's cottage. He'll let me use his phone again. They'll have to believe us this time!"

"Tell Uncle Matt I'm waiting here," I called, as Larry turned toward the beach.

I listened to the sound of his footsteps growing fainter as he ran. I stood against the sand, leaning up against the side, and looking upward at the ledge. I

was sure it was a woman, for the blue was like a skirt. It was too far away to see the hands or the face, but the skirt billowed in the wind and the yellow formed a bonnet brim. They were the only other colors in a brown- and green-filled world. I don't know how long I stood alone and stared.

It was quiet in the canyon, and it was quickly growing dark. The shadows fell like fishnets and hauled away the sunlight. My neck began to ache as I stared up at the tree. I put my hand behind my head and tried to lean against my arm. It was getting dark so quickly, as though the trees were sucking in the night. I had to move my neck, had to stretch my arms again. My muscles were so cramped that my head began to hurt. I looked down at the ground and rubbed my hand against my neck. Then I looked back up again.

She was gone.

CHAPTER FIVE

I blinked my eyes and looked again. Twilight was complete; the shadows made the shapes change form—perhaps I was mistaken. But no, there was nothing wedged against the tree roots. It was impossible! How could she disappear? There hadn't been a sound; there wasn't any movement.

Far away an owl was hooting, and animals were stirring in the foliage, but the cliffside was quiet. Quiet and very, very empty. My heart began to pound. I tightened up my fists. I could hear my breath come faster.

And then I was running up the path again. I don't know how I did it, don't know why I did it. My mind was choked with fear. I ran like a wild animal fleeing for his life. Then, halfway up the hill, I tripped on a tree root and crashed to the ground. The fall brought back my senses.

I lay there panting, trying to breathe through the pain, trying to feel where I was. The earth smelled damp, and leaves rustled near my head. I could not move. Was it a snake? The rustling grew fainter. The owl in the ravine was calling, "Whoo?" "Whoo?" I lay there panting, my brain whirling. "How?"

"How?" What was in that ravine? What was on that cliffside?

"Kipper? Kipper?" It was Larry. He was coming down the path.

I sat up. "She's gone!" I shouted, my voice cracking in the darkness. Birds flew from the trees. "She's gone again, Larry."

"Weren't you watching?" His voice traveled down the hill before him.

I could not answer. I heard his steps come faster.

"Where are you?" he called.

His dark figure reached my side. I stood and tried to see his face, feeling that I'd failed. "I only turned away a second, Larry. Just to rub my neck. And when I looked up again, she was gone."

"Wasn't there any noise?"

"Nothing."

"That's crazy!"

"But it's true! She's not there, and I was watching all the time."

Larry turned to look down the dark trail. "I already called Dad," he said. "He was just about to leave the office when I called."

I swallowed hard. "What'll we tell him?"

"Well, it *was* Mrs. Danbury," Larry said loudly. "We know for sure it was. We can't tell Dad how she got on that hillside and you don't know how she got off, but we both know she was there all right."

"Shall we go back and wait for him down there? He'll have flashlights. Maybe we'll see something."

Larry shook his head. "Let's talk to Dad. He'll decide what to do. We'll probably just have to wait. When Mrs. Danbury doesn't show up, everyone will know we were right." He sighed loudly. "I just can't believe she disappeared like you say she did."

I felt my neck flush. "But she did," I repeated. "She really did."

"But she had to go up or down," he said, not looking at me. "She couldn't have been a ghost."

"A cave?"

"There aren't any caves around here," Larry answered impatiently. He turned and started up the hill again.

We trudged along in darkness, bumping into trees, falling over bushes, hungry, tired, and angry with each other. There was nothing we could say. Everywhere around us the small animals moved, but we heard only our own thoughts. Nothing in nature can match the volume of the human brain.

Finally, at the top of the hill, we saw a light again. The cottage where Mr. Kreebs was staying was bright with lamplight, and a car was parked near the fence. We quickly looked ahead at the cottage nearer to the canyon edge. It was dark.

"Mrs. Danbury isn't there," Larry said with satisfaction. "I knew she wouldn't be."

"Is that you, boys?" The door of the lighted cottage opened, and Mr. Kreebs stood silhouetted on the porch. "I was waiting to hear what happened down there this time."

When we were nearer to the porch, I saw him smile. "I thought you were going to wait down there," he said. "I thought you were going to wait by that—that body, or whatever."

"It's not there anymore," Larry said slowly.

"Just what I thought!" Mr. Kreebs laughed loudly. "Pulling our legs again, huh? You boys and your pranks! You almost had me convinced this time, but I bet you won't be pestering out here again." He opened the door wider. "Come on in—might as well wait here for your father. Once he gets out here on another wild-goose chase, I bet he won't let you come back again. I could see you playing that prank once, but tw—"

"What's that?" A deep voice sounded from behind the closed door to our left.

"It's nothing—just those kids I told you about," Mr. Kreebs answered. He nodded at the closed door and spoke to us again. "Jerome doesn't think much of your jokes, but I think you're just having a little fun."

Having the sympathy of Mr. Kreebs was worse than having his contempt. "It isn't fun," I said, remembering the aches in my legs and chest.

"And it isn't a joke," Larry added.

"You mean you really think a body could be there one minute and gone the next? That's impossible! You'll have to think of a better story than that. What will you tell your father this time?"

"We'll tell the truth," Larry said. "We did see that

body—it must be Mrs. Danbury because of the clothes. And nobody has seen her today."

Mr. Kreebs frowned in the direction of the other cottage. "I haven't noticed her lights, but she may be back soon. It's not late."

Larry and I said nothing. We stood by the door like nervous puppies. Then we heard the sound of a horn, and saw headlights flashing. We ran out on the porch.

Uncle Matt climbed from his car. "Is your body still down there?" he called when he saw Larry.

"No," Larry answered, running to the car. "But—"

"Didn't think it would be," Uncle Matt said. He walked to the other side of the car and opened the door. "Look who was walking along the road."

A figure stepped out from the car; a tall, thin figure, wearing a long skirt and a large bonnet.

Larry gasped. "Mrs. Danbury!"

CHAPTER SIX

Mrs. Danbury stood blinking in the glare of the headlights, her small face peering out of the depths of the bonnet like a football sticking out of an arm grip. Her arms were two matchsticks covered in yellow, and her legs were two brown umbrella handles supporting a blue skirt.

I stared at her with the same sensation I once got when I accidentally swallowed an ice cube. At my first sight of her, I was so shocked I nearly choked; then I felt surprise that anyone who looked so harmless could cause so much trouble. She was tall all right, but she was so skinny she looked as though she would break in two if she ever decided to bend over. Her skin was like that tissue paper you crumple all up at a birthday party.

"Mrs. Danbury was walking," Uncle Matt said. "I found her near the road."

Larry caught his breath. "But we saw—"

"You fooled us all right," Kreebs said quickly. "Talking about seeing a body and all that nonsense—kids do anything to get attention."

"What are they doing out here?" the old woman demanded. She looked from one face to another. "And what's everybody staring at me for?"

I wish I could explain how her voice sounded. It wasn't cracked or high like you might have thought it would be—it was loud and seemed to rumble up from somewhere deep inside.

"The boys thought you'd fallen over the cliff," Uncle Matt explained. "They saw something on that ledge when they were hiking in the canyon."

The woman pressed her lips together and frowned. "You'll never catch me falling off this place—I'm too careful." She turned back to the car and slammed the door. "Thank you for the ride," she said, "but I could have walked just the same." She nodded to Kreebs, then hurried toward the dark cabin. She walked away with her head high, somehow leaving us with the idea that out of the whole group, she was the only one with any sense. Some people say more by not saying anything than most of us can say in a whole afternoon of conversation.

"It can't be!" Larry said. "I *know* she was down there."

"Looks like you're falling for your own joke," Mr. Kreebs said. He turned to Uncle Matt. "Well, doubt if I'll see you out this way again, Chief Levitt. It must be hard on you running out here for nothing. But don't be too harsh with the boys—they were just having a bit of fun. If they stay away from this ravine, they won't be seeing things anymore." He slapped Larry on the back, laughed again, and hurried to his cottage.

"Climb in, you two." Uncle Matt's words were clipped. He opened the door of the car.

"We have our bikes—" Larry went closer to the car. "We can ride them home, Dad. We both have lights."

"Guess you'll have to." Uncle Matt sounded tired. He started the motor. "I'll have supper waiting."

We rode home as fast as we could, but I'm afraid it wasn't very fast. After the trips we had made up and down that hill all afternoon, both Larry and I felt like a steamroller had used us for practice runs. I ached in every inch of my body and my brain hurt most of all. My thoughts pounded against my skull in rhythm to my feet pedaling on the bike.

I forgot Larry was right there ahead of me. I forgot where I was going. All I remembered was that strange sight, that blue and yellow form hidden on the ledge. What had really happened?

Crickets sang as we moved along, the wind rustled, the trees swayed. Far away a dog was howling, desolate and hopeless. There was the crunch of the gravel under our tires, the creak of my bike seat when I moved too quickly. These things were real, they existed. But the woman had been real too—hadn't she? How can you ever know anything for sure?

"Kipper?" Larry's voice broke into my thoughts. He slowed down as I reached his side. "What do you think went on today?" He spoke softly, his voice melting into the darkness.

"I was just wondering too, Larry. I can't come up with any ideas at all."

We pedaled a few moments in silence before Larry

spoke again. "It must have been Kreebs, you know, Kipper. He ran that whole show."

"But how?" I was ready to accuse the man myself, but even wild accusations have to be based on some sort of reasoning. "You know that nobody could climb up or down to get to that ledge—it's impossible."

"But what about a dummy? Suppose Kreebs stood on top of the canyon and dangled a dummy over the edge on a long rope—wouldn't that do the trick?"

"Sure it would!" I felt gladness prick my arms. The impossible could be explained after all. "But why? Why would Kreebs want to do a thing like that? There isn't any sense in it."

"But did Kreebs have a chance to do it—then get rid of it without our knowing?"

"Well, sure, he had the chance all right. He was on top of the hill when we were at the bottom. But even so, it still doesn't make sense."

Larry was silent. Then a few moments later, his voice came floating through the darkness. "But at least we know how it could be done, even if it doesn't make sense."

I just watched the straight beam of light coming from my handlebars. Then I added, "The only thing I know for sure right now is that my legs hurt."

"I think we set a record, Kipper. We climbed in and out of that ravine three times."

"That was exactly three times too many."

Larry was too tired to answer that one.

Dinner that night with Uncle Matt was an hour of pretending. He pretended that he had forgotten our false alarms and we pretended that his pretending fooled us. We talked about the weather, the ball games, the new traffic light, and the latest moon probe. In fact, we talked about everything except what all three of us were thinking about.

After dinner, Larry and I went to the basement for a game of ping-pong. The games were fast—there was no time for talking. Upstairs we heard the television, and downstairs we heard only the steady rhythm of the ball hitting the table. Then Larry won his third game and plopped on the floor. I always want to keep on playing when I'm losing, but I was too tired that night to care. We sat together, leaning against the cold cement of the basement wall.

"I can't get that ravine out of my head," Larry said suddenly.

It was as though he had spoken my thoughts. I felt that queer, scary feeling you get when it seems that someone has read your mind.

"Things happen for a reason," he was saying. "Everything has an answer. Think of all the problems we've solved in school—we get the facts, then we find the answers. Why can't we do that now?"

"Because the facts are crazy to begin with," I said, speaking my own thoughts now. "First there's something on the ledge, then there isn't. Then once again we see something, then once again we don't. It's crazy."

"Okay then, if the facts are crazy, then how about the answer? Does the result make any sense?"

"That's just it," I said. "There isn't any result either. We called your father twice about the body, but that action didn't bring any result, did it?"

Larry shook his head. "No," he said, scraping his wooden paddle on the rough floor. "Calling Dad sure couldn't have mattered. He didn't see anything at all."

We sat in silence, watching the moving paddle. I tried to look at the problem from other directions, tried to stand away from it and see it with the eyes of a stranger. Faintly then, I felt an idea begin to form. It was just a spark at first, so I fanned it with fantasy.

"Larry," I said slowly, "suppose we were to call Uncle Matt again about something we found out there in Dixon Canyon?"

"Are you loony?" Larry looked at me in disgust. "If we called him again, he'd never believe us. No matter what we said. He's had two false alarms from us in just one afternoon."

"Maybe that's your answer right there," I said quickly. "He wouldn't believe us if we called again."

"What answer?" Larry frowned at me, his red eyebrows almost meeting.

"The answer to our problem," I said impatiently. When I get an idea I can never understand why other people don't get the same idea immediately. "Don't you know that story about the boy who called 'wolf'? He was supposed to guard the village sheep and only call for help in an emergency. But he was so lonesome

all alone in the fields, that he called 'wolf' just to get company. The people came running twice and found there was no wolf, so when he called a third time, they all ignored him. There really was a wolf that time, but it didn't matter to them. They had been fooled twice that day and they thought they were being fooled again."

"You mean you think somebody fooled us into making those calls because he was afraid we might have a real reason for getting Dad out there?" Larry's green eyes were huge.

"It makes sense, doesn't it? If we saw something strange out there now and tried to tell your dad about it, we'd be laughed out of the police station."

"Hey, that's it, I bet! I bet Kreebs really does have something queer going on out there. He kept trying to make sure we wouldn't be back. And we already figured out how he could have pulled that stunt on the ledge."

"You going to tell Uncle Matt?"

Larry shook his head and smiled. "Better than that —we'll go out there and check for ourselves."

"Back to the canyon?"

"Sure." Larry stood up, his face flushed. "I think we should pay another call on our friend tomorrow. He won't be expecting us. Maybe this time we'll see something that he didn't plan on our seeing."

"But what would we say to him?" I asked, afraid I'd gone too far. I had forgotten how dangerous it was to get Larry interested in things. He's like a tire swing

all wound up—give him one push and he whirls right on past you.

"We're not going to ask him anything, Kipper. We're just going on a long, quiet hike in a public canyon."

"This I have to see," I said, knowing that the jaunt with Larry would be anything but quiet. I knew beyond all doubt that the hike Larry was planning was not the kind they talk about in Boy Scout manuals.

CHAPTER SEVEN

We had planned to leave early in the morning and have lunch near the ravine, but Uncle Matt had lawn work for us to do. He would be on the night shift that evening, so he was at home during the day to supervise. We would have done what he asked anyway, but maybe we wouldn't have done it quite so well. As it was, it took us all morning to mow and rake the lawn.

"Let's eat lunch at home, then," Larry told me, "and we'll take sandwiches for later."

"I'm so hot now I don't care whether we go out there or not," I answered.

But I was more than ready to go two hours later, when we had finished doing the lunch dishes. We had talked and talked about what we might find out in that ravine, and I could hardly wait to get started. Uncle Matt was cleaning the garage when we finally had our gear ready, and somehow, in the confusion of leaving, we were not forced to tell him where we planned to go. Later that night we wished we had told him, but at the time, we thought we were lucky that he hadn't asked.

At three o'clock that afternoon, we reached the road leading to the canyon. We had taken the state

highway until we turned off onto the road that led to the ravine path. The sun beat down, and there wasn't any wind. Dust from the road rose up and covered our clothes and our bikes. I was so hot that it stuck to me like a second skin. Now and then a breeze came from the lake, but it wasn't cool enough to make any difference.

"Think it's worth it?" Larry asked, stopping his bike and putting his feet on the ground.

"No," I told him. "I'm so hot now that all our ideas sound stupid. What can we do out here anyway?"

"If we can't think of anything else, we can always ask Mr. Kreebs how he's coming on his pottery collection," Larry answered.

"You wouldn't!"

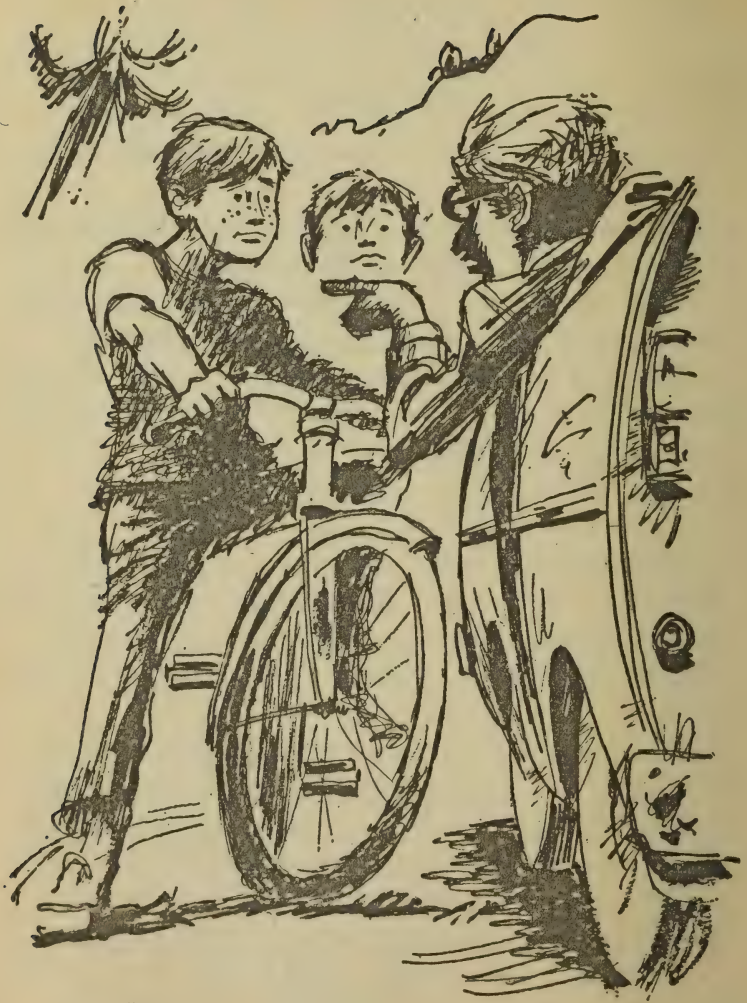
"Oh no?"

The sound of a motor interrupted us. It was coming from the canyon road. Dust reached us before anything else did, but soon, with a squeal of brakes, a maroon convertible stopped and a man looked out at us.

He was bookish-looking—sort of like somebody you'd see in a library reading room holding one of those thick books that you think are there just for decoration. His glasses were dark-rimmed, and made his long nose look even longer. His hair was completely white, but his eyebrows were thick and dark.

"You boys from around here?" He leaned out of the car, pushing his glasses higher onto his face.

Larry nodded and drew closer to the car.



"I'm looking for a grocery store. Anything nearer here than Ludington?"

"You working with Mr. Kreebs?" That Larry! How could he do that? He simply blurted out the question. He wanted to know, so he asked. He does things like that all the time.

"You know Marvin?" The driver frowned. "Hey, are you kids the ones who say you saw a body in the canyon?"

"On the cliffside," Larry answered.

"Look, we don't want anymore of your games. Stay away from here." The man leaned out farther. "We're working in that area now and we don't want anybody out there." He shifted gears and skidded off.

"So that was Powers," I said, staring after him. "I don't think he liked us very much."

"That's all right." Larry leaned back on his bike seat. "There may be some others who won't like us before this day is over. I'm sticking here until I find out what's really going on."

"Maybe they're digging for pirate treasure," I said, laughing.

Larry blushed. "I'm not that silly," he said. "But they must be digging for something. I saw shovels by their door last night."

"But what would they be digging for? I know there's oil in this part of Michigan, but you don't go after oil with a shovel."

"I've been trying to think back. I know the Dixons owned this place a long time because I've heard people

mention them. There was some big deal about them and then they left the state. I don't know who owned it next. Some guy thought he'd make a resort out here, but that never panned out. Mrs. Danbury's the only owner I really know about, and she sure couldn't have anything worth much."

I shrugged my shoulders and looked up the path. "Well, now or never," I said. "As long as we're out this far, we might as well make the trip worthwhile."

We parked our bikes in some bushes near the road, then walked up along the fence to the canyon. Larry walked ahead of me, nearly running, waving our canvas bag. Ahead of us the cottages perched like two bookends holding the blue sky between them. I wondered what was going on inside their walls. We saw nothing moving, and we could hear no one speaking.

"Looks deserted," Larry said. He stopped and waited until I reached his side. We edged nearer to the fence, listening as we moved. But we heard only the sound of the waves.

"Guess everybody left," I said, feeling a river of relief spring up inside my stomach.

"They might be out walking. But there's only one way to be sure." Larry opened the latch on the gate and walked to the cottage nearer the cliff edge. "Mrs. Danbury!" he shouted loudly, knocking on the door. I wondered what he would say if she suddenly flung it open. With some people all words seem useless.

"Guess she isn't in there," Larry called from the porch. He walked aross to the other cottage.

"You're not going there, too!"

Larry grinned and nodded. He climbed the porch and knocked on the screen door. I stood outside and listened to my heart beat. But no one answered there either.

"Funny that they're all gone," Larry said slowly. "But maybe it's just as well. We can get into the ravine again now, and they won't know we're down there."

"You mean use the path without asking?"

Larry's red face grew redder. "Well, we can't climb down the cliffs and there isn't any path down that south hill. It would take hours to go up the road and hike all the way back here."

"But yesterday you said it would be trespassing."

"Yesterday I hadn't seen that ledge," Larry answered.

At the time that seemed reason enough to me. I went inside the gate, latching it behind me.

We hardly spoke as we went down the hill. I guess we both felt kind of foolish. Neither one of us knew exactly what we expected to find, but each of us was secretly sure that he would be the one to find it first. Maybe we actually believed that old saying that a criminal always returns to the scene of the crime—at that point I guess we thought that what we had seen was like a criminal, furtive and unknown. At any rate, it was cooler walking under the shade of trees, and I was glad we had left the hot sunlight.

Halfway down the path, we heard a crashing. We

peered ahead, looking down at the winding path before us, and we saw the red hat of Mr. Kreebs moving through the trees, steadily coming closer.

"Now we're in for it!" I whispered. "Kreebs will have a fit when he sees us here again."

"Maybe he hasn't heard us," Larry whispered back. He pulled my arm. "Let's duck in the bushes here. All those leaves should hide us."

We fell to the ground off to the right of the path, and the bushes and ferns closed around us. Larry put his finger to his lips. We stared at each other and listened to the crashing sound of the footsteps drawing closer to our hiding place.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I heard only his heavy breathing as he came nearer to us. I didn't dare move to look at him. My forehead was pressed against my arm and my skin was wet and clammy. I felt the vibration of his steps; then the leaves rustled in the path beside us. I held my breath, and clenched my fists.

The steps didn't stop! Kreebs hadn't heard us. My chest hurt as I let out my breath. I hugged the ground and listened to the noises move farther away.

"That was a close one!" Larry whispered. "Did you see him?"

"No. I was afraid to turn my head."

Larry sat up and looked down the path. "He wasn't carrying anything with him. If they were digging in the canyon, they haven't found what they were looking for. Wonder if they left the shovels down there."

"Maybe we'll be able to see what they're working on," I said. "Maybe they left some clues."

Larry grinned at me. "You sound more like a detective every day, cousin. We probably wouldn't know what to do with a clue if we had one."

The sun was low over the lake when we finally reached the beach. The water was a golden river

where the rays were falling, surrounded by slowly moving blue ripples. Our shadows were long on the yellow sand, as we searched for a good place to leave our lunches and our flashlights.

"Come on, Kipper," Larry said. "Let's see if they've been digging. We have a lot of searching to do before dark."

I nodded; then we hurried into the ravine. How familiar everything looked! Had it been a full twenty-four hours since I had stood and stared up at that ledge? At that thought I quickly looked up, but there was nothing. The ledge was only green. I sighed in relief.

"Bet I know what you're thinking," Larry said, laughing. "I felt a little better myself when I looked up and saw that we were still alone." He ran ahead of me.

"Kipper!" He called my name before I'd even noticed where he had run. "Look at this!"

He was over by the south side of the canyon, staring near the bottom of the cliff.

"What is it?" I shouted. Then I saw what it was he stared at. Two shovels were propped up against the trees at the foot of the cliffside. All along the wall, there were large holes dug into the earth. Sand and clay lay in huge piles at the foot of every hole.

Larry stared at me. "Digging in the wall! That's a new one on me. What could be in there?"

I started to look more closely at the holes. There seemed to be no pattern—they were dug at irregular

intervals all along the cliffside. "This gets worse instead of better," I said. "There's something in the wall they're after, and it sure can't be Indian pottery."

"They must be planning to dig all along the canyon. They left both the shovels. Wonder if Mrs. Danbury knows about it."

"Wonder if Mrs. Danbury is in on it," I answered. "Remember, we thought she was the one on that ledge yesterday."

"Well, she couldn't fly up there," Larry said quickly. "She's an oddball all right, but not that odd." He smiled. "I wish you could see her on the warpath, Kipper. One day I saw her chasing after the mailman yelling, 'Hey, Sonny'! Can you beat that? The mailman must be nearly fifty."

I felt an uneasy thought filter through my laughter. "You know, Larry," I said slowly. "She sure acts like she's a lot younger than you think she is."

"Oh no!" Larry winked at me. "You're not going to tell me she's disguised or something!"

I felt my face flush and was glad it was twilight. I guess the idea did sound sort of crazy.

"What I think," Larry said seriously, "is that Kreebs and Powers want us to be suspicious of her. I bet they both had something to do with that business on the ledge."

"But that's silly," I said. "Why should they care what we think?"

"Oh, I give up!" Disappointment makes me discouraged, but it makes Larry angry. "We ride all the

way out here thinking we'll be big heroes and find proof of what we saw yesterday and now we end up with an even bigger puzzle."

We half-heartedly searched through the ravine, but we saw nothing more. At last Larry said we had hiked enough. "What a worthless day," he complained. "Let's get back up that hill."

I looked at the darkening sky. "It's going to be completely dark before very long. And I'm starving now. Can't we eat our lunches down here?"

Larry shrugged. "Might as well. We can make a campfire on the sand, I guess. At least we'll get some good out of this trip. We can use our flashlights to climb the hill later."

It didn't take long to get a fire ready. The beach was full of dried driftwood, and there were dead tree limbs all over the canyon floor. Larry piled the driest twigs together and struck a match. The flames spread to our sandwich wrappers and the wood began to crackle.

We sat cross-legged, and I thought of the thousands of Indians who must have done the same thing in the same area hundreds of years before. The fire felt good, for with the darkness had come the cold, damp air. A few feet away, waves washed ashore quietly. We munched sandwiches and watched sparks from the fire fly into the night. There seemed to be a light haze rising from the water, but the fire was bright. It crackled loudly, then there was silence.

Suddenly I sat up straighter. What was that noise? I heard it again, faintly. It was yards away, in the

denser part of the bushes. A rustle? No, whispers! But how could that be? We were the only ones near the ravine.

I touched Larry's arm. "Do you hear something funny?"

The flames made his face paler against the dark of the night. "It's only the leaves rustling against each other in the wind," he answered. Then he added quickly, "What'd you think it sounded like?"

I listened again, but I heard nothing. "It's silly, I guess," I finally answered. "But it almost sounded like somebody whispering."

Larry looked at me strangely, but he said nothing. We finished our lunches quickly, then began to put sand and water on the fire. I heard the water sizzle on the hot stones, smelled the pine-scented smoke, but I thought only of the strange noises I had heard.

And then they came again! Not whispers, exactly, but strange sounds. I reached for my flashlight and touched Larry's hand reaching for his. We turned without speaking and ran toward our path. The sounds had been coming from the left of it, from a place we had not explored.

We crashed through the bushes, beaming our lights ahead. And then we both saw him. Right before us, on the ground, lay a man with his arms and legs stretched out in all directions. He lay face downward and he lay very, very still.

CHAPTER NINE

Both of us fell to the sand at the same time; both of us tried to turn him over. It was Mr. Powers—I had known it the minute our lights had flashed on his white hair. He started to groan when we turned him. Then his eyes opened in the glare of our lights. "Who is it?" he moaned.

"It's us," Larry said, excitedly pointing the flashlight at me. "What happened to you?"

"My glasses—where are my glasses?"

"They're right here," I said, beaming my light to the ground. I picked up the glasses, and handed them to him. "What happened?"

Mr. Powers ran his hand over his hair. "I don't know —my head—I'm trying to think. We saw smoke—"

"That was from our fire," I said quickly.

He pushed his glasses on. "We didn't know. We came down to see who it was." The words were slow and jerky.

"Who did? You and Kreebs?" Larry's flashlight wavered. "There's no one else here now."

Powers sat up straighter. "Now I remember! Marv was walking behind me. We were walking down the path, when all of a sudden—" He stopped, then

shouted, "He must have done it! He must have hit me over the head!"

I felt my mouth drop open. "Kreebs hit you?"

"He must have—he was right behind me when I felt the blow." His words were running together, and he was trying to stand up. "I wondered why Kreebs was so anxious to get me down into this ravine tonight. Now I see why. Now that he's half-killed me, I finally understand."

"Are you sure you're all right?" I asked. He acted so strangely that I wondered whether he should even be sitting. He still seemed to be in a daze.

"We knew the first time we saw him that he wasn't here studying Indians," Larry said before Powers could answer me. "We can't figure out what he *is* doing here, though."

"Neither can I." Powers sat back and sighed. "I was fool enough to believe that research story. He's had me digging all afternoon and I never even knew what we were digging for. He said to call him if I found anything unusual. Tonight, when I finally told him I wanted the truth, he said he would tell me everything after we'd come down here to see about that smoke." He lowered his head and rubbed his forehead. "It feels like he must have hit me with a sledgehammer."

I put my hand toward him. "Let me—"

"No!" He pulled away, then added, "I'll get a doctor to look at it."

"How?" Larry asked. "Should Kipper and I hike up the beach until we get to another cottage?"

There was no hesitation. "We'll go to my cottage. There's a telephone there."

"Can you climb that hill?" My voice cracked on the question. "After being hit like that, will you be able to walk up to the top?"

"I'm fine now. I can walk." He rose to his feet.

"But what about Kreebs?" Larry stood and glanced up the pathway. "What if he's waiting for you?"

"I'll handle Kreebs," Powers told us. "If you two help me up the hill, I'll take care of Kreebs." He put his arm on Larry's shoulders. "Good thing for me that you were down here." He paused, then added, "I'm sorry about this afternoon." Then he turned and started toward the path. "Well, no sense in wasting time, let's get going."

I looked doubtfully at Larry, but he was already walking. "We'll have to call Dad," he was saying. "Now at least we have some proof that something queer is going on out here." I stood staring after them a moment, then picked up my flashlight and followed.

The haze from the lake had turned into fog. It hung on our clothes and our skin, as we started up the path. We only had the light we carried, for the moon was covered. Strange noises came from the dense blackness on either side of us, and there was the sound of crickets. I heard the sound of the forest and knew it was real and natural. I heard the sound of Mr. Powers' voice and I wondered. That afternoon he had seemed to be one type of person and now he was another. And

Kreebs kept changing too. How would Larry and I ever find out what they really were?

Halfway up the hill we stopped to rest. By this time Powers was nearly panting. He had stumbled more each step he took. "You shouldn't have tried to climb up here tonight," I said.

He sat and leaned against a tree. I could hardly see his face in the dim beam of our flashlights. "I'm fine," he answered. "It was the same for me this morning. I'm not used to hikes like this. Head wound or not, this trip is tough."

"That's for sure!" Larry lay flat on the ground. He turned his flashlight off.

The darkness jumped in closer. My battery was fading, my light was almost gone.

"Tell me more about that ledge," Mr. Powers said suddenly.

"What ledge?" Larry's voice sounded tired.

"That one in the ravine here. Isn't that where you say you saw something the other day?"

"We did see something." Larry's voice was awake now. "But no one believes us."

"I do."

I saw the dark outline of Mr. Powers lean forward. His white hair stood out in the blackness. "I wondered if Kreebs had something to do with that too. Tell me about it."

"It looked like a body," I said. "We thought we saw someone lying on the ledge up there."

"We thought it was Mrs. Danbury," Larry said.

"We thought she slid down the cliff and landed there. But the ledge is so full of bushes and things, we couldn't see very well."

"And a tree," Mr. Powers said. "Isn't there a tree lying on that ledge? Do you know if it has been there very long?"

"It's been there since I can remember," Larry answered. "I guess it landed there when the cliff collapsed."

"Couldn't you get to it somehow?" Powers asked eagerly.

Larry shifted his weight; the leaves rustled. "Not very easily. You can't get up there from the bottom—it's sand and the bushes aren't strong enough to hold your weight. I guess you could slide down from the top—but how could you get up again? It's straight down."

Powers leaned back again. "Well, I guess Kreebs had nothing to do with it after all."

"He might have," Larry said quickly. "I thought he might have thrown something over the edge on the end of a rope."

"No." Powers stood up. "There wouldn't be any reason for him to pull a trick like that. Let's just forget about that angle." He started forward, all of a sudden in a hurry. "We're halfway up—the rest shouldn't be too bad." Larry and I looked at each other a moment, then pointed our flashlights at the cluttered pathway and followed.

We were at the top when Mr. Powers spoke again.

"The car's still here," he said. "Kreebs must be inside. We'll have to go in carefully."

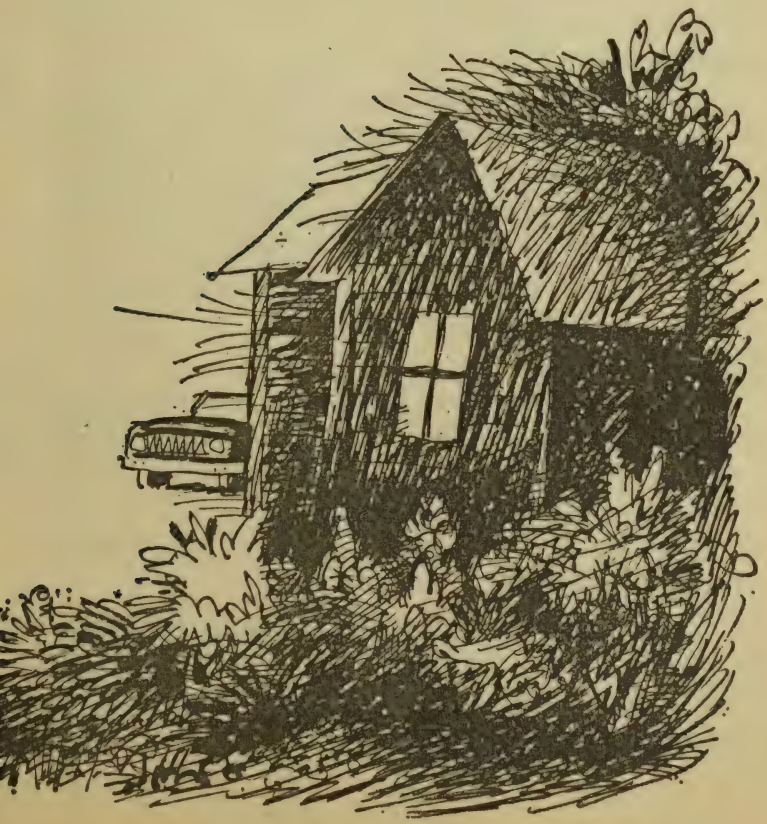
"Go in?" Larry took the last step up, still panting from the climb. "You think we should all go in there?"

"It'll catch him off guard," Powers answered. "If we all three suddenly appeared in the doorway, what could he do? It's the only way."

"I think we should get Uncle Matt," I said. "We can't do anything alone."

"Are you scared?"

"No," Larry said before I had a chance to answer.



"But he did hit you." I glanced at the cottage. "You don't know what he'll do next."

"Only one way to find out." Powers turned and moved ahead, Larry by his side. I caught up with them in three steps.

When we reached the door, Powers flung it open and stepped inside the cottage, Larry and I right behind. We dropped our flashlights on the porch, and the door slammed shut. We caught a quick glimpse of Kreebs in the large room, then Powers sort of pushed us both aside and hurried to the room on our left. The door slammed behind him.

I don't know who was more surprised, Mr. Kreebs, or Larry or me. We both stood inside the doorway with our mouths hanging open, and Mr. Kreebs sat wide-eyed with his newspaper crunched up on his lap.

"What is this?" he finally spluttered.

Larry and I didn't know what to say, what to do. We looked at each other, then we stared at Kreebs.

The large man moved from his chair, and the paper dropped to the floor. "Have you been snooping around here again?"

"You saw our fire," Larry said.

"What fire?" Mr. Kreebs stopped. "What fire are you talking about?"

"In the ravine," I said quickly. "And we found Mr. Powers where you left him."

"He said you hit him on the head," Larry added. "And left him lying down there."

"Jerome!" Mr. Kreebs stood in the same spot, shouting toward the closed door.

Powers came out slowly. He was buttoning another shirt.

"These kids say they found you lying in that ravine," Kreebs said. He walked closer to Powers. "They tell me that you said I hit you over the head and left you down there."

Powers drew his dark brows together. His mouth formed a whistle. "What imaginations! First a body, and now this!"

"You mean they made all this up too? You weren't in any trouble?"

Mr. Powers looked at us and winked. "Sorry to spoil your story, boys." He turned to face Mr. Kreebs. "I was out walking and they walked with me. That's all there is to it."

CHAPTER TEN

How can I ever explain what I felt at that moment? Something like a squashed grape. Everything inside of me seemed to be gone. Mr. Powers looked so cool and calm standing there—Larry and I were red and almost shaking. I could feel Mr. Kreebs's cold gaze measuring us, and I felt myself growing smaller and smaller in his eyes.

"You did say that!" Larry shouted at the white-haired man. His freckles stood out on his pale face. I could see that he felt sure that the real truth would be recognized the minute he revealed it. In that first flash I had known that the truth in this case would be entirely decided by Mr. Powers.

"Say, what is this?" Mr. Kreebs inched toward the door, watching us through narrowed eyes.

"I think these kids mean to make trouble for us," Powers said quickly. "They've been hanging around here for two days making up stories."

"We did not make them up!" Larry shouted. "You were down there tonight. We helped you up the hill."

"You have no proof of that," Powers said calmly.

"But you were our proof," I said. "We thought—"

"I told you they knew too much," Powers inter-

rupted. He looked at Kreebs. "They never believed that research story; they told me so tonight."

"Didn't believe it?" Turning to Larry, Kreebs added, "What made you doubt that?"

"There never were Mohawks in this part of Michigan," Larry answered.

"I thought I saw your ears perk up when I said that was the reason for our being here. Well, you put me on the spot with your nosey questions." He laughed and patted his pocket. "So I'm not a professor and I don't know the first thing about Indians. But I've got the key here that means the secret doesn't get any farther than this room."

"Come on, Kipper." Larry grabbed my arm. "There's something screwy around here. Let's get—"

"You're not going anywhere." Mr. Kreebs was in front of the door now. We saw him pull the key from his pocket, and the door lock snapped in place.

"You can't keep us here," Larry said, but his voice shook.

"You've been trespassing, haven't you?" Powers asked. "We thought you liked it here."

"My dad knows where we are," Larry lied.

Kreebs shook his head. "I don't think so. He wouldn't have let you come back out here after all that ruckus you caused yesterday. That story was another phony."

"But he believed it," I said, pointing at Powers.

"You did?" Kreebs narrowed his eyes at his partner now.

"It's another one of their stories." Powers looked away, pushing his glasses tighter to his face. "They're making it up."

"You asked us about it," Larry said. "You wanted to know about that ledge."

"What ledge?" Kreebs moved closer to Powers.

"Can't you see they're only trying to make trouble between us?" Powers backed away. "I tell you, they know too much."

"So what are we going to do about it?"

"You should get rid of them," Powers said easily, as though someone had asked him what should be done with old newspapers.

"How?"

"Tie them up—take them away from here until we get what we came for. You could leave them in any of the forests around here."

"You keep talking as though I'll be doing it all. Aren't you planning to come along?"

Larry and I looked from one man to the other. We could feel the tension between them.

"I'm beat," Powers said. "I'll stick to the cottage while you're gone."

"Oh no," Kreebs answered. "We'll do it together or not at all."

I moved my feet, and the floorboard squeaked. Both men looked at me.

Powers shrugged. "Lock them in the closet until we figure out what to do, then," he said.

Mr. Kreebs reached us in one step, grabbed us each

by an arm and dragged us to a closet. He shoved us in. The door slammed; the lock clicked.

For a few seconds we just stood there, stood in the dark. Then, when we fully realized where we were, our first thoughts were not why we had been locked inside, but how we would get out. Larry began feeling the walls. "It's a pretty big closet," he whispered. "Maybe there's another door—or a light."

But there wasn't. We felt it all, inch by inch, and found it was nothing but a ceiling and four walls. One side sloped down, so we could stand upright only near the door. It was long and narrow. And dark. Only a crack of light showed through from the other room. I sat on the floor, banging my back against the door as I slid down, feeling sick and hopeless.

I guess our pride was hurt more than anything else. We had thought we would be great heroes—like knights rescuing a princess in a fairy tale. Too late we discovered that we had rescued the dragon.

"He can't do that to us!" Larry began pacing the floor. I was too discouraged to point out that Kreebs already had.

Larry whirled around, his head thudding on the sloping ceiling. "Darn it!" He felt his way over to my side and slid to the floor. "Why didn't we sock him? We were two against one."

"I was already in the closet before I even thought of it," I confessed. I had wondered the same thing myself, though. Why is it you can be so much braver when the time for courage has passed?

"Fine thing this is! That Powers! We should have left him lying on the beach. It was a trap from the beginning!" Larry was really mad; I could imagine his flushed face in the darkness. "What do you think is going on out there now?"

I put my head to the floor, my ear to the open crack. But I heard nothing. The closet muffled all sounds. "They must have gone to another room."

"I don't get it! I just don't get it!" Larry's elbow hit the door as he turned to me. "Why should he lie like that? What's he trying to do?"

I swallowed loudly, afraid to trust my voice. What a big difference between Larry and me—he was worried about the reasons why we were there; the only thing I was worried about was our health. What was going to happen to us?

"You think they'll really—really do what Powers said?" I asked.

"I don't know." Larry's voice was clear.

We sat in silence a few seconds, then I spoke. "We should have told your dad where we were going."

Now Larry's voice was shaky. "Too late for that now."

An idea stirred a hope. "Do you think Uncle Matt will start to worry about us? Maybe even look for us?" I asked eagerly.

"He's working tonight—remember?"

I leaned back against the wall, sorry that I had asked.

"Did you see how they acted to each other?" Larry asked me.

"I don't think they trust one another," I answered. "Kreebs didn't want to leave Powers here alone—anybody could see that."

"I wonder why." Larry paused. "The more I think of it, though, the more sure I am that it has something to do with that ledge."

I sat up straighter. "The ledge?"

"Sure. That's the only thing Powers asked us about. He got real chummy, then he asked about it."

I thought about it a minute. "But did we know any more about it than he knew already? Did we tell him anything important?"

"I guess not," Larry said at last. His voice sounded small in the darkness.

Neither one of us had a watch, so I don't know how long we waited in there. After a while we didn't talk at all—there wasn't any point to any of our conversation. Everything ended with a question.

The more we sat, the hotter we got. Larry and I unbuttoned our shirts, but it didn't make much difference. We were straining our ears to listen. We were cramped sitting on the floor, and we were scared. At that point I couldn't have cared less about Kreebs and Powers and Mrs. Danbury. All I wanted was a bath and a bed, and they could have dug away the whole cliffside for all I cared. I'm afraid my desire for knowledge isn't as great as my desire for physical comfort. I sat feeding my anger with silence.

Suddenly we heard a door slam. The noise seemed to rouse us both. "Listen," Larry whispered, "in case they do try to take us away from here, we've got to have a plan. We've both got to try to break away from them at once. Between here and the car, there's a lot of space—and it's dark. We should try to kick at their legs and make a break for it. Maybe one of us could get away for help."

Larry spoke so fast I could hardly understand him. It seems strange when I think about it now that we hadn't talked of escape sooner, but I guess we figured that if we never mentioned danger, it might not really come.

I waited until Larry had stopped to breathe, then I broke in. "But if we run out there in the dark, we'll be running near the edge of that cliff." I swallowed loudly, as steps thudded nearer to us. "Wouldn't it be—"

"We'll have to take that chance!" Larry whispered.

I wondered fleetingly which would be worse—being a victim of Mr. Kreebs or being another casualty of the cliff. Then I had no more time to think. The closet door opened.

"Out!" Kreebs ordered. "We're taking you out of here."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Just minutes before, Larry and I had been dying to get out of the closet, but now that we had our chance, we found we were more afraid to leave it than we were to stay inside. Sometimes the present, bad as it might be, seems better than an unknown future. Both of us began slowly backing farther inside the cubbyhole.

"Come out here!" Kreebs held the door open wider, and we could see Powers right behind him. We stepped out together, hitting our arms against the door edges.

The bright light hurt my eyes, and for a few seconds, I only stood there blinking, but Larry faced the men right away. "What are you going to do?" He sounded brave, but I could see his right eyelid twitching.

"So at last you're getting worried!" Mr. Powers spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "You should have been more worried yesterday when you started this whole thing."

"He said we could use your cottage path," Larry said, pointing to Kreebs.

"I thought the best way to get rid of you was to

let you get down there. I didn't think you'd keep hanging around."

"It was that body," I said. "We saw that thing on the ledge and we had to find out more about it."

"There wasn't any *thing* on that ledge! You just wanted to see what we were doing out here."

"But we didn't see," Larry said. "We didn't see you doing anything."

"There's no sense in standing here arguing," Powers said quickly. "They'll never tell the truth. Look at that story they made up about me. I'll tie them up in the car—then you can take them off and dump them somewhere."

"You're coming along too, Jerome," Kreebs said slowly. He turned his unblinking stare on his partner. "We agreed to take care of them together."

Powers frowned and pushed his glasses. "You don't really need me. They'll be all tied up."

"You're coming along."

The two men stared at each other for a full minute, then Powers turned away. "All right. You're the boss." He grabbed my arm and started pulling me toward the door.

So we were to be tied up and left somewhere. I felt little gladness at that news. I had been in Ludington long enough to know that there were hundreds of places that were so far away from everywhere that no one ever saw them. Larry and I could lie hidden somewhere for weeks—but then I remembered Larry's plan; we still might have a chance. We were going to

walk willingly until we were well out into the darkness. Then we were both going to try to make a run for it. Maybe in the confusion one of us would really get away.

As the four of us stepped into the night, I caught my breath. Larry and I were lucky. Our one chance might work. The fog was thick, and the night was black. We could hardly see each other through the heavy mist.

"I parked the car down toward the road," Powers said. "I don't like getting close to that cliff."

The fog was so thick that when we came to the fence we nearly ran into it. Larry and I said nothing. We stood motionless while Kreebs fumbled with the gate lock. My brain was spinning. When were we going to make our break? I was waiting for Larry; was he waiting for me?

We turned toward the car. I tried to walk slower, but Powers pulled my arm. I heard Kreebs curse the blackness. I tried to will myself to break away.

Then suddenly a figure jumped out of the darkness; a voice broke into the night. "Who's that?"

It was Mrs. Danbury. I knew it was even as she spoke, but I didn't stop to think. That queer deep voice of hers startled Powers so much that he dropped my arm. I bolted blindly into the night.

"Where'd he go?" Powers shouted.

"Get that kid!" Kreebs screamed. "That redhead just kicked my leg!"

I ran like a wild thing, my feet hardly touching the

ground. I was free! I stretched my arms out to gather speed and felt freedom encircle me. Footsteps pounded behind me. I pushed forward harder. And then—then I felt my feet fall out on loose ground and even before I had consciously realized what had happened, I heard myself screaming. My body plunged down. I slid against the cliffside; then there was only blackness.

CHAPTER TWELVE

When I opened my eyes again, I was staring into the face of a witch. A candle flickered, throwing weird, long shadows, but I knew the face was real. It hung over me, for I lay flat on the ground. The wrinkles stood out on the skin like lines on a dead leaf; the hair stretched from the head like white fuzz from a milkweed seed. Funny little cooing sounds came from the toothless mouth.

I felt my stomach heave. I knew I would be sick. I tried to jump up quickly, then something hit my head. Everything began to fade. I fell back to the ground again.

"Kipper!"

I tried to move my head. I knew someone was whispering my name, but it hurt too much to think.

"Are you all right? Answer me!" Rough hands were pulling me upright.

It was Larry. I opened my eyes to darkness but my thoughts were bright inside my head. "The witch!" I shouted. "Watch out for the witch!"

"Be quiet!" Larry put his hand over my mouth and whispered hoarsely. "They're still after us, Kipper. I

was running from them when I tripped over you. I—I thought you were dead."

I struggled from Larry's grasp. My head was pounding, but I was trying to understand. What had happened to me?

"I thought you went over the cliff," Larry was saying quietly. "I heard you scream when you ran from Powers and I thought you went over the cliff."

His awed whisper quieted me. For a second I felt nothing. Then I remembered the freedom, the air rushing out on all sides of my body. I *had* fallen over the cliff. But that was impossible! I rubbed my head with my hand trying to force my memory back into place. "Where are we?" I asked, trying to see through the darkness. The fog had drifted away, but the darkness covered everything.

"In the bushes behind their cottage. I've been trying to work my way toward the road. They've been after me with a flashlight, but I heard them go back to the house." Larry kneeled forward. "We've got to move now while they're inside. Can you walk?"

"It's my head," I answered. "My head hurts and I feel picky all over."

"You sure fooled everybody, Kip." Larry's voice rose in pride. "We all thought you had gone over the cliff for sure."

"I did go over," I said. "I did step off."

Larry stiffened. "You couldn't have. You couldn't be up here now if you had. You'd be in the ravine."

"But I tell you, Larry, I—"

A car door slammed. Funny how such a simple sound can bring so much terror. The small noise vibrated through both of us; goose pimples formed on my arms. They were using a car to find us! They would use headlights to search the sides of the road.

"We've got to find better cover!" Larry whispered. "They'll be here in seconds."

I stood up, too scared to worry about telling my story. Larry pulled my shirt sleeve; we ran to the woods on the north. Over my shoulder I could see the car headlights glaring on the road leading from the cottage.

"They've been trying to find me for half an hour," Larry panted while we ran. "They were almost on top of me twice. But I know the woods better than they do. It was just luck that I found you—I'd been running back there like crazy, afraid to try for the main road." He led us to the left, and I felt tall trees surround us. My knees felt like wet cotton candy. I sank down to the ground.

"Are you all right?" Larry fell beside me. "You must have had a bad time too—but at least you can rest for a few minutes here. Just stay flat. They're checking along the path." He paused, then spoke in a lower voice. "Where were you before, Kipper?"

I opened my mouth to answer, eager to pour out the strange story. "I fell over the cliff, Larry. I really did. One minute I was running, the next second I had stepped right out onto loose sand. It seemed almost like I was flying—I felt myself bumping against the

side of the cliff." I stopped. What had happened next? "I can't remember how I landed," I finally admitted. "I must have blacked out on the way down. But when I came to, I saw this witch. There was a light, a candle, shadows, and smoke—we seemed to be in a small place. Then—then I think someone or something hit me on the head."

I finished lamely. Even as I had spoken, I had sensed Larry's disbelief. And as I had sensed it, I had spoken less convincingly. When I suspect that someone does not believe me, I try to make it more real by talking more. But I guess too many words make everything sound even more false. Like then—the scenes were so alive in my mind, but when the words came out, they had sounded bare, foolish . . . how could I ever expect anyone to believe them?

"But you couldn't have fallen," Larry said. "You couldn't be in the ravine one minute and out of it the next."

"I tell you, I did fall over the edge!"

"You probably fell on top and knocked yourself out," Larry answered impatiently. "You probably dreamed about a witch." I made a quick protest, but Larry stopped me. "We can't talk about it now anyway, Kipper. We've got enough to worry about."

When my health is at stake, I forget about my honor. I was ready to do whatever Larry asked. "Shall we try to run ahead?"

"We're pretty well hidden here. I think we should lie on the ground and hope that they go on past us.

We could never run faster than they can drive the car. We'll just have to hope that they won't search the sides of the road thoroughly. They'll probably figure I'm making a beeline for town."

"They have flashlights," I said.

"It's our only chance, even with the lights. If we can stay quiet enough, they might walk right on past us. Lie flat—even if one of them walks on your hand, don't make a sound."

The car was creeping closer now. As we had whispered together, the men had gradually moved along the road, shining the headlights of the car and then searching the bushes with flashlights by foot. Now they were almost upon us. I could hear their voices; in seconds I could understand their words.

"If that kid gets into town, we're finished, you know." It was Kreebs speaking. His form was silhouetted in the headlights.

"You should have hung on to him," Powers answered, beaming the light in all directions.

"Me? What about you? The kid you had got away, too."

"But we don't have to worry about him now, do we? He won't be doing any talking after the fall he took. If it hadn't been for that old woman, though, I'd still have him."

Mr. Kreebs swore. "That old bat! What brought her out just at the time we were dragging them out to the car?"

"Good thing for us that she's so old, she's half senile.

She was probably so scared, she never knew what happened. And maybe she did us a favor. I know that short kid went off the cliff—he ran right toward it. That takes care of one of them anyway."

"But it doesn't help us with the other one. You think he's already heading for town?"

"Let's check the side of the road again, Marv. We'll get him if he's still around."

The two men left the motor running and began walking to the woods where we lay. I saw them coming and I could count every step, for with every step they took, my hands grew colder. My throat grew tight; my stomach knotted. I tried to quiet my breathing—I was trying to will my heart to stop beating.

Kreebs flashed his light in all directions. I felt its glare over our heads. They were standing only a few yards away. "It's a waste of time here—he's running on the highway."

Powers mumbled something I could not hear; then coming closer, he spoke louder. "It's still our word against his anyway. What if he did get to town and told his dad about tonight? There isn't any proof. We can't help it if his buddy fell off the cliff."

"They made up the story of that body—maybe we can make it sound as though that redhead made all this up too," Kreebs said slowly.

I could just imagine how he looked when he answered like that—he could change personalities with the tone of his voice. In a flash I saw him wringing his hands and mopping his brow in front of Uncle Matt.

"An unfortunate accident," he'd say sympathetically. It was all I could do to lie there quietly. I wanted to fly out of hiding and—I don't know what I thought I could do. I lay there feeling helpless. I heard him sigh, and then he added, "Still, I don't think it's safe to stick around here."

"You shouldn't have let them use that path in the first place," Powers complained. "It's your fault that they've been hanging around out here."

"My fault? Look, do you have any idea of how to handle kids? Well, I do. If I'd said no that first day, they really would have suspected something funny."

"So you said yes and let them in. And they've been out here ever since."

"It was that body they thought they saw. Can I help it if they imagine things?"

"Well, I wish they would have imagined them somewhere else."

The two men stood in silence a few seconds; then Kreebs spoke. "You think it's worth hanging around here any longer? That police chief is sure to be back. Why take any more chances?"

"Because of the money, that's why." Powers' voice was so loud I nearly jumped. He was standing only a few yards away.

"The money? We don't seem to be finding it, do we? Dixon bragged a lot in prison, but not enough to make us sure where he hid it. 'In the side of a cliff behind a tree,' he told us. We could spend the next ten years digging behind all the trees in that ravine."

Larry grabbed my arm as Kreebs was speaking. We lay flat on the ground ten miles up in the air. It was all I could do to keep myself from shouting. Then the leaves rustled nearer.

"Let's check the highway a ways," Powers said. "We might find that redhead yet."

They moved away toward the car. My muscles jerked when I saw their lights disappear. I hadn't realized how tight I had been holding my legs until they began throbbing. I felt sweat on my cold hands. My stomach was wet from the damp ground.

"That ledge!" Larry whispered to me before they were out of sight.

"I know. I know it!"

We watched the taillights round the bend to the highway. "They're gone," I said. "What'd you make of that money business?"

Larry was rubbing his legs. "Dixon was the name they used. That was the name of the first people out here. Somebody named Dixon hid money in the ravine and ended up in prison."

I smiled in the darkness. "The minute that Kreebs mentioned it was in the cliffside behind a tree, I thought of that ledge."

"Me too," Larry answered. "We've had that ledge on the brain."

"Kreebs didn't think of it, though. He sounded ready to give up."

Larry stood up. "But Powers knows," he told me. "I think we've just found the reason for that knockout

business. He wanted to find out more about that tree on the ledge, then he wanted to get rid of Kreebs so he could check it out. He probably figured he could lower himself down on ropes while the three of us were gone."

"But that doesn't explain what we saw yesterday," I said. "And I still can't figure out what happened to me tonight."

"We've got to get to town," Larry said quickly. "We've got to tell Dad."

I tried to stand, and found that nothing hurt. But a small question pierced my thoughts like a hornet. "Larry—Larry, do you think Powers might have been right? Do you think your Dad might not believe us?"

Larry was suspiciously quiet. I felt the hollow in my stomach grow heavy. When he spoke, he sounded embarrassed. "Kipper, just one thing—maybe you'd better—I mean, I think we'll have a better chance of being believed if we just stick to facts."

"Facts?"

Larry's voice was gruff. "That witch—that witch business. Let's try to skip that part for now."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I was glad the night was so black, for the darkness covered my face. Larry's words had hurt me, and I knew my expression would reveal my feelings. I was also angry, but I wanted to keep my emotions all to myself. You can share some emotions and they seem to get smaller, but anger only seems to grow. It gets larger every time you think of it.

We walked quickly through the blackness, saying little, seeing nothing. As I walked I felt my anger disappear. My story seemed unbelievable—how could I blame Larry for not believing what I hardly believed myself? What had happened to me was fantastic, but then just about everything that had happened at the ravine was fantastic: disappearing bodies, tourists who lied, hidden money, a weird witch—it was all too far-fetched to be real. But it was real, all of it. And I was determined to prove it somehow.

We walked about a block from the main highway, following it north. There were no cars, no people. In the distance was the sound of Lake Michigan; in the foliage was the sound of crickets. My left knee began to ache. My head was hurting, and I felt itchy all over.

"Walking back here takes a lot longer," Larry said

at last. "But I guess it's a lot safer. Kreebs and Powers might be waiting on the highway."

We walked along in silence a few more yards, then Larry spoke again. "Do you really think you went off that cliff?"

I knew then that Larry was ready to listen to me, and I was glad I had concealed my anger. "I really did, Larry."

"I guess you must have then; but I still can't see how you ended up where you did." He paused, sighing loudly, then added. "But I guess I'll start believing anything at this point."

"And your dad?"

"We'd better not tell him how you fell. Let's just tell him how Kreebs and Powers grabbed us. That's the biggest thing right now."

"But will Uncle Matt be able to do anything about them?"

"When he hears what happened to us, he will."

"And that hidden money," I added. "He'll want to check on that."

"Kipper—let's not tell him about that."

"Why not?"

"Just because. Don't tell him about hearing Kreebs and Powers talk about it. I'll tell him later. Okay?"

"Okay. But I hope you have good reasons, Larry."

We had come closer to the city limits by this time and soon we saw a streetlight up ahead. As we neared it, I heard Larry gasp. He was standing still, staring at me.

"What's the matter? What's the matter with me?" I looked down at my legs. By the rays of the streetlight I could see myself—my clothes were hanging in shreds, my pants were stained, my shirt was ripped.

"Your face is all cut up!"

I looked at my hands—they were scratched and cut.

"You did go off that cliff, Kipper! It looks as though you rolled down a whole mountainside."

I did little to smother the fire of smugness growing inside of me. "I told you I did—I tried to tell you I did."

"Dad will fly out there once he gets a look at you! We don't have to worry about him doubting our story now! But I still can't see how you did it, Kipper. I can't figure it out."

I smiled through my scratches. When suffering is noticed, it doesn't seem to hurt so much. "I can't figure it out either, but I'll tell you this—after seeing that witch, I know the answer won't be simple."

"You don't think she flew you up that hill on the back of her broomstick, do you, Kipper?"

I socked Larry on the arm and, laughing, we hurried into the city.

We were surprised when we passed a store with a lighted clock showing what time it was. It was only eleven thirty. After all that had happened, we thought it would be a lot later. You can never depend on time: an inch is always an inch, but an hour changes its length with your mood.

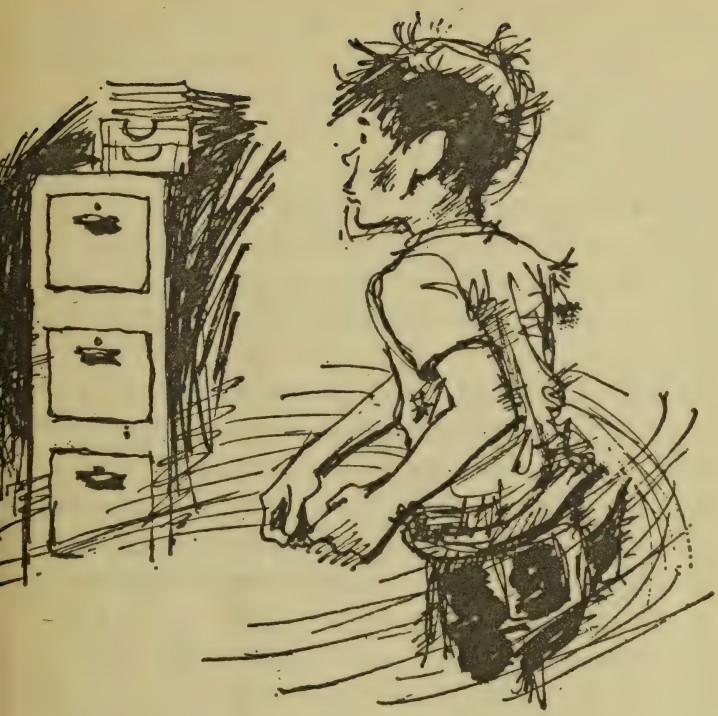
"Gosh, Kip, I wonder if that clock is right," Larry

exclaimed. "I thought we were in that closet at least an hour."

"It felt like an hour."

"It felt like a week. But I'll be glad if it isn't any later than that. It'll be easier to walk to the station than to walk to the house, and Dad will be working until midnight. Maybe we can still catch him."

We hurried through the empty streets, heading west. The police department was near the lake, and



we had entered the city only a few blocks from it. It didn't take us very long to run those last few blocks. My leg had stopped hurting and even my head felt all right. I guess the thought of being able to show off my wounds made me forget my pain.

Larry ran in the station ahead of me. The clock above the door showed eleven forty-five.

Uncle Matt was sitting at his desk when I came through the door. Larry was babbling out everything

at once: the imprisonment, the chase, the escape. Uncle Matt looked confused. He was rubbing his hand across his eye.

His face changed when he saw me. "Christopher!" He almost vaulted from his chair. "What happened?"

"That's what I've been trying to tell you," Larry said impatiently. "Weren't you even listening?"

Uncle Matt was beside me, checking my face, feeling the bump on my forehead. "Are you hurt anywhere else?"

"You've got to go out there and get those two," Larry said loudly. "Christopher will be all right. Let's get out there and get Kreebs and Powers."

I have to admit I enjoyed the attention I was getting, but I knew Larry was right. "We should go out there now, Uncle Matt. I'm fine—but Kreebs and Powers might not be there very much longer."

Uncle Matt hesitated a few moments, then made a quick telephone call. "Lew's coming in to man the desk," he said when he hung up. "I'll pick up Carl and we'll drive out to the canyon right now."

"Can we go, Dad? Can we go too?"

"You'll stay in the back seat of the car—you won't be allowed to get out."

"That's okay!" Larry shouted while I nodded my head.

"Christopher needs those cuts doctored," Uncle Matt continued. When he saw my expression, he smiled. "But I guess a half hour more won't hurt him.

What happened to cause all this? What's the story about those cuts? Where'd you fall?

"Where were you this afternoon, Dad?"

I was glad Larry broke in with his question right then. I could never have answered Uncle Matt without telling about that fall, and I guess Larry knew it.

"That business yesterday got me wondering," Uncle Matt answered. "I thought I'd check up on that canyon property. The courthouse records show that the Dixons were the earliest owners. They had a large family, mostly boys, I guess, and they used the area for camping and hunting. In 1935 they sold it all to a man named Brusby. There had been some sort of scandal, the records secretary told me. The older Dixon boys were arrested in Illinois."

I heard Larry catch his breath, but I tried not to look at him.

"No one seems to know what happened to the family after they left here," Uncle Matt continued. "The older boys were tried for robbery and sent to prison. The rest of the family disappeared."

"What happened out there then?" I asked, because I had to say something.

"Brusby owned the land for nearly twenty years. He had plans for making a park out there, but nothing ever materialized. After you've once seen the view, there isn't anything more out there. Mrs. Danbury bought the land in 1955 and she's owned it ever since."

"Mrs. Danbury saw them chasing us!" I said, sud-

denly remembering that voice in the night. "You could talk to her and—"

The door opened, Uncle Matt's relief hurried in, and before the door slammed shut again, the three of us were on our way to the car.

During the trip back to the canyon, I tried to understand why Larry didn't want the ledge mentioned. I could see why he wanted me to forget about the witch—that story was fantastic. But what Powers and Kreebs had said about the money—that was true; especially when we connected their story to the one Uncle Matt had just told us.

Uncle Matt and his driver mumbled softly from the front seat. I supposed they were discussing what they could legally do. They would have to be careful how they handled things at the cottage.

Larry peered nervously out of the window all the way out. He wiggled on the seat and crossed and uncrossed his legs.

And then we were turning onto the dirt road leading to the ravine. I, too, began to peer out of the window into the darkness. The car headlights showed the two dark cottages. I stared at the one Kreebs had rented. My stomach sank. "There's no car there," I said. "They must have left already."

The car brakes shrieked, and Uncle Matt hurried into the night. His driver slammed the car door and followed. We heard loud pounding, then there was silence.

"They're gone all right," Uncle Matt told us a min-

ute later. "But they can't be too far ahead. Let's start using this radio, Carl. I want a description of the car radioed in all directions. We can have them stopped and held for questioning before they get out of Michigan."

"It was a maroon convertible," Larry said excitedly, "and—"

I wasn't listening. Both Powers and Kreebs had left, yet I knew Powers suspected that something was on that ledge. Did he plan to come back later without his partner? Or had he never really left? And why didn't Larry want Uncle Matt to know about the money? The whole puzzle seemed impossible. Somebody kept taking the pieces away.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Oh, Dad will find them soon enough," Larry assured me later that night when we settled in the twin beds in his bedroom. "They won't get out of Michigan."

"Do you think Powers really left?" I asked. "I'm sure he thinks the money is on the ledge behind that big dead tree."

"Maybe he plans to come back later without Kreebs." Larry laughed in the darkness. "He couldn't get rid of him this time no matter how many tricks he played."

"But you'd think he'd be afraid to leave it down there. Somebody else might find it before he gets back."

"Who? It must have been hidden since the Dixons owned that ravine years and years ago. Powers doesn't know we heard them talking in the woods, so he figures it's safe where it is."

I leaned up on my arm and tried to see Larry. "How come you didn't want your dad to know?"

Larry's bed creaked. "Because I want to look for that money myself."

"You? How can you do that?"

"With ropes. See, the way I figure it, Kipper, we can do it together with no one else knowing about it. Then if we really find the money down on that ledge, we'll have the whole story for Dad."

"But that's dangerous, Larry. I don't know anything about climbing with ropes."

"You don't have to know. I'm the one who'll do it. All you have to do is stand on the top and guide the rope for me. We have to go back out to get our bikes, anyway."

"What if Powers is still somewhere out there?"

"Oh, Kipper, you worry too much." Larry's voice was fainter. He sounded half-asleep.

I was tired too, and the bed was warm and soft, but I sat up and leaned closer to Larry's bed. "You better let your dad and his men do it. They'll know more about it than we do."

Only heavy breathing answered me.

"Are you listening?" I asked into the darkness. Larry made no movement. Was he only pretending to sleep so he wouldn't have to answer me? I started to get up, then lay back down again. What difference did it make? I knew I would go with Larry no matter how foolish his plans were. When Larry was around, facts seemed to fade away.

Eight hours later we were back at the ravine. It was a bright morning; the woods around Kreebs's cottage looked green and alive. It was hard to believe that anything bad had ever happened there. I stared at the

scene and thought about how little people really matter to nature, how—

"Quit dreaming, Kipper! I thought you came out here to help me."

I looked over at Larry standing near the big tree beside the fence. He was tying thick ropes together; his face was so red I could hardly see his freckles.

"What if she comes out?" I said, nodding at Mrs. Danbury's cottage close behind the fence.

"That's a chance I'm taking. Come on now and help me get this rope tied around the tree trunk."

"I still don't think this is safe," I said, picking up the rope. "What if it should break?"

"It isn't going to break! I'm making sure of that. These ropes are used to tow cars, and I'm a lot lighter than they are."

"You should have had your dad come with us, Larry."

"He's worried about other things now. The Benton Harbor police can't hold those two men very long. Dad has to see whether they really are Powers and Kreebs."

We tightened the rope around the tree, pulling it again and again. I had to admit that Larry had chosen a strong rope. But would it really hold him?

"See, this other end will go around my waist. I can let myself down the cliff gradually, and if I slip or the sand caves in, the rope will catch me. You can sort of let out the slack from up here."

I frowned and shook my head. "I think you're nuts,

Larry. No amount of money is worth getting killed for."

"Oh, I'm not getting killed! I've read lots of books on mountain climbing, Kipper. This is how they do it. Now watch the rope for me."

I stood back while he walked toward the cliff edge. My hands tightened as the memory inside of me shrieked out the feeling of falling. But Larry did not fall. He lay down flat on the edge of the cliff and began sliding down, on his stomach, feet first. He did it without a sound. I saw his red hair drop from sight and then I watched the rope, trying to keep it from going too fast, trying to reassure myself that it would hold to the tree trunk.

And then there was no slack in the rope at all. I called to Larry from the top, but I could hear no answer. I stepped a little closer and called him once again. Only the sound of the waves echoed up from deep in the ravine. My heart began to pound. I held the rope and walked nearer to the edge, then fell on my stomach and crawled to the dropoff. My hands clenched the rope as I peered over from the top. I saw the rope ahead, leading down the canyon side, ending at the fallen tree. But Larry? He was gone. He wasn't even there!

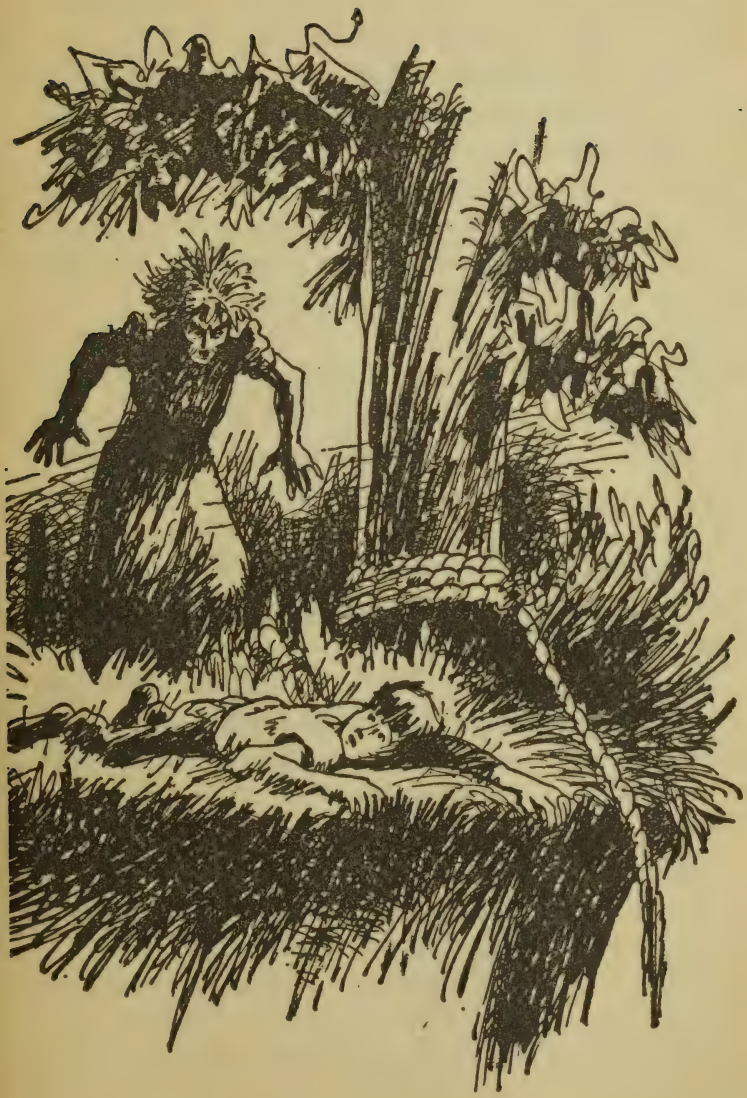
And then I heard the voice.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"What're you doing here?"

I was lying on my stomach, peering over the edge of the cliff, and the voice came from behind me. Goose pimples rose on the back of my neck. I held the rope tighter, afraid to turn too quickly. Gradually I inched my way backward to firmer ground.

"Are you like them others?"



I had worked my way to solid ground, still clutching at the rope. I sat up and saw her.

It was Mrs. Danbury. Without the funny bonnet. Her hair stuck out every which way, and when I saw it I knew she was the witch I had seen in the candlelight. I stared up at her in the sunlight and saw how old she was. Her face was wrinkled, her eyes watery.

"It's Larry Levitt," I said, my voice cracking. "He wanted to see what was down there."

"Down where?"

"By that tree down on the cliffside. Did I see you in the ravine last night?" I squinted my eyes against the sun and blurted out the question. I knew how stupid it sounded, but I could not keep myself from asking.

"Is he digging like them others was?" She acted as though she had not even heard me. She kept staring at the rope leading from the tree.

"He's not digging," I said, standing up. "We just wanted to know if anything was down there."

"He'll find it and then everybody will know." Her face was sad.

"Find what?"

"Find what them others wanted. I been taking care of it for my boy. But now folks will know and take it all away and I won't have it anymore."

"Take what away?" She might have been talking in another language—her words had no meaning. Yet I stood there listening, trying to make sense out of what she said.

"I'll show you. Those others chased you. But I won't hurt you. Those others were bad, they chased you in the forest. But I took care of you. And now I'll show you because that other boy will know it anyway." She started toward her house, beckoning for me to follow.

"I can't go and leave Larry," I said. "He's down at the end of this rope—he's right on the side of the cliff."

She shook her head. "He's not there."

How did she know? Without speaking, I grabbed the rope, fell to the ground, and crept forward. I suppose I should have been more careful—she could have pushed me over, and by then I knew her mind was queer, but I forgot her momentarily and I thought only of Larry.

"Larry! Larry, can you hear me?" My voice echoed down the cliffside, but only the sound of the waves answered. I peered over the edge. There was no sign of Larry near the tree. What could have happened?

I inched backward again and rose to my feet. I still didn't know what Mrs. Danbury knew about Larry or the cliffside, but I was so afraid that I let her be the guide. My brain felt like soggy cornflakes.

I followed behind her a few yards to the porch of her cottage. She opened her door and called to me. I hesitated, looking at her, then looking back at the canyon ledge. "Come on," she called again. "I'll show you."

I moved up the steps and saw the inside of her house. It was dark, for the shades were all pulled down. Her

whole cottage was one room, dusty now and almost empty. In the dim light I saw boxes for chairs, a three-legged table propped up with a tree branch, a rumpled bed. She crossed the room and opened a back door.

"I'll show you," she said again.

I crossed the room and stood at the top of a long, narrow flight of stairs. They seemed to lead to nothing but deeper, damper darkness. The woman had started down. She had lighted a candle she had taken from the top step and her shadow danced crazily on the stairwell wall. My hands formed fists as I swallowed and stepped down. The steps creaked. I held myself tense, ready to run. My chest hurt from holding my breath.

We came to the basement, but the room was empty. There was only dust and cement, no windows. I felt my stomach tighten. Had I been led into a trap?

"He isn't here," I said foolishly, for I knew he could not be.

"Watch." She hurried to the middle of the cellar and put her candle holder down. I saw her squat near a small square. There were hinges.

"A door!"

I heard her give a small laugh as she began to raise the trap door. Then I heard a scraping, a scratching. It was coming from beneath the floor!

She flung the small door back; a head appeared, and then shoulders.

"Larry!"

I don't know which of us was more surprised. It was

Larry—it really was, his red hair flashing in the light from the candle, and he was standing up, only his head showing above the cellar floor. His face was dirty, his hair full of sand.

"Kipper! What is this?"

Mrs. Danbury held the candle higher.

"Is this her house?" Larry looked around the empty room.

I grabbed his arm. "How did you get down there? I couldn't see you by the tree."

Larry stopped gazing around the room and looked straight at me. "There's a tunnel down there—the tree blocks the entrance, and there's—"

"You found it." Mrs. Danbury stepped forward. "You found my box."

"It's the money, Kipper! There's a whole trunk full of money down in that tunnel!"

Mrs. Danbury sighed. "Now everyone will know," she said sadly. "But I been waiting so long now I guess it don't matter anymore. You'll take it all away."

Larry hardly heard her. "There must have been a river flowing underground here, Kipper! There's a long, long tunnel, but it's only reinforced this far. It's all wooden planks and boards. The river must have carved out a tunnel, then dried up, a long time ago. Maybe that's why the land caved in out here."

"And what about that body?" I asked. "What about that body we saw?"

"That was me."

We both turned to look at Mrs. Danbury. "I saw you watching me so I was quiet," she said. "I like to sit by my box and watch the lake. I wait for my boy to come home. Sometimes I lie there behind the tree."

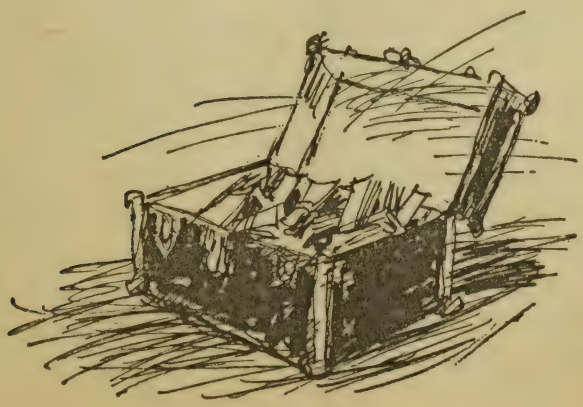
"Her boy?" Larry looked at me, wide-eyed.

"She must have been Mrs. Dixon!" I said, and my voice cracked with excitement.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

We soon found out that I had been right: she was Mrs. Dixon—or at least she had been. The whole story was complete late that night when Uncle Matt returned from Benton Harbor. He brought Kreebs and Powers back with him on suspicion of attempted kidnaping, but they had denied everything until they realized that the money had been found. Once they knew it was safely in the hands of the police, they admitted what they had been trying to do.

"They had been in prison with the older Dixon boy," Uncle Matt told us. "He had bragged to them



for years about the money he had hidden away in Michigan, so when they were released, they decided to break parole to try to find it. Dixon's brother had died and no one else knew about it. At least, Powers and Kreebs thought that no one else knew.

"Actually, Ralph Dixon had told someone else about the money years before. He had a stepmother when he and his brother lived out by the ravine, and he sent a letter outside the prison telling her that he wanted to see her. The money had been hidden for years, and he was worried. By this time his stepmother had been widowed again and was completely alone, still living in Illinois. Ralph Dixon had always been a favorite of hers, so she said she would do everything he asked. He only wanted her to check to see that the cliffside was the same as it had been—that no more land had collapsed into the ravine. He knew his father had sold the property, but he didn't think the tunnel would be discovered because it had been so well hidden.

"But Mrs. Danbury had other plans. She came back to Ludington, bought the land under the name of her second husband, and had two cottages built, one directly over the tunnel that her stepson had told her about. She dug the passage down to it from her basement, then rented the other building out to tourists to get a small income. When she found everything in order, she didn't write to Dixon. Somehow, in her confused mind, she thought she should simply guard it until her boy came home.

"By the time Dixon met Powers and Kreebs, he had

given up hope that his stepmother was helping him. He hadn't heard from her in years and he thought she might have disappeared or died. Kreebs and Powers never even knew about her."

"They thought she was balmy," I said.

"In some ways, I guess she is." Uncle Matt leaned back in his chair. "She's like a miser now, selfish and single-minded; but she helped you when you needed it most. She found you when you slipped down that cliffside, Christopher. Luckily you landed on that ledge and only knocked yourself out. She said she dragged you into the tunnel, and when you woke up, you jumped up so fast you knocked yourself out again on the boarded ceiling. She half-carried, half-dragged you up the stairs to the outside."

"Boy, I'll never forget that night."

"Some witch!" Larry laughed.

"What'll happen to her now?"

Uncle Matt smiled. "She liked the money to look at, but she never knew its value. She'll be just as happy without it; I guess she'll stay in her cottage. She's harmless enough."

"It's funny nobody recognized her when she came back here," I said.

"No, not so strange." Uncle Matt shook his head. "Twenty years can change a person completely—more than you could guess. And even as Mrs. Dixon, she had never made close friends."

"What I can't figure is why nobody found that money any sooner," Larry said.

"It was pretty hard to reach that ledge, and that big dead tree hid the whole tunnel opening." Uncle Matt winked at me. "You'd have to be crazy to climb down there."

"Aren't you glad I'm crazy then?" Larry asked happily.

"Just a little." Uncle Matt put his hands behind his head and smiled. "We can turn all that money over to the Illinois police—it will make the Ludington Police Department look pretty good."

"And Powers and Kreebs will go back to prison," I added.

We sat in silence a few moments, a silence noisy with happiness. Then Uncle Matt spoke again.

"I have to give you boys the credit for all of this. You did most of it yourselves. In fact you solved this mystery even before I knew one existed. How is it that you stumble into things like this?"

Larry punched my arm. "It's him," he said laughing. "Kipper gets us into all these messes."

I laughed then, too. I guess I could have argued with him about that point, but it didn't matter to me then because I was so happy.

Avon Books are available at special quantity discounts for bulk purchases for sales promotions, premiums, fund raising or educational use. Special books, or book excerpts, can also be created to fit specific needs.

For details write or telephone the office of the Director of Special Markets, Avon Books, 959 8th Avenue, New York, New York 10019, 212-262-3361.

BOOK ONE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Adapted for young readers by Catherine Edwards Sadler

Whose footsteps are those on the stairs of 221-B Baker Street, home of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the world's greatest detective? And what incredible mysteries will challenge the wits of the genius sleuth this time?

A Study In Scarlet In the first Sherlock Holmes story ever written, Holmes and Watson embark on their first case together—an intriguing murder mystery.
The Red-headed League Holmes comes to the rescue in a most unusual heist!
The Man With The Twisted Lip Is this a case of murder, kidnapping, or something totally unexpected?

Join the uncanny and extraordinary Sherlock Holmes, and his friend and chronicler, Dr. Watson as they tackle dangerous crimes and untangle the most intricate mysteries.

AVON CAMELOT

AN AVON CAMELOT ORIGINAL • 78089 • $1.95
(ISBN: 0-380-78089-5)

Avon Camelot Books are available at your bookstore. Or, you may use Avon's special mail order service. Please state the title and code number and send with your check or money order for the full price, plus 50¢ per copy to cover postage and handling, to: AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Department, 224 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

BOOK TWO

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Adapted for young readers by Catherine Edwards Sadler

The Sign of the Four What starts as a case about a missing person, becomes one of poisonous murder, deceit, and deep intrigue leading to a remote island off the coast of India.

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle It's up to Holmes to find the crook when the Countess' diamond is stolen.

The Adventure of the Speckled Band Can Holmes save a young woman from a mysterious death, or will he be too late?

Join the uncanny and extraordinary Sherlock Holmes, and his friend and chronicler, Dr. Watson, as they tackle dangerous crimes and untangle the most intricate mysteries.

AN AVON CAMELOT ORIGINAL •78097 • $1.95
(ISBN: 0-380-78097-6)

Avon Camelot Books are available at your bookstore. Or, you may use Avon's special mail order service. Please state the title and code number and send with your check or money order for the full price, plus 50¢ per copy to cover postage and handling, to: AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Department, 224 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

BOOK THREE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Adapted for young readers by Catherine Edwards Sadler

The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb When a young engineer arrives in Dr. Watson's office with his thumb missing, it leads to a mystery in a secret mansion, and a ring of deadly criminals.

The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet Holmes is sure that an accused jewel thief is innocent, but will he be able to prove it?

The Adventure of Silver Blaze Where is Silver Blaze, a favored racehorse which has vanished before a big race?

The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual A family ritual handed down from generation to generation seemed to be mere mumbo-jumbo—until a butler disappears and a house maid goes mad.

Join the uncanny and extraordinary Sherlock Holmes, and his friend and chronicler, Dr. Watson, as they tackle dangerous crimes and untangle the most intricate mysteries.

AN AVON CAMELOT ORIGINAL • 78105 • $1.95
(ISBN: 0-380-78105-0)

Avon Camelot Books are available at your bookstore. Or, you may use Avon's special mail order service. Please state the title and code number and send with your check or money order for the full price, plus 50¢ per copy to cover postage and handling, to: AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Department, 224 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

BOOK FOUR

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Adapted for young readers by Catherine Edwards Sadler

The Adventure of the Reigate Puzzle Holmes comes near death to unravel a devilish case of murder and blackmail.

The Adventure of the Crooked Man The key to this strange mystery lies in the deadly secrets of a wicked man's past.

The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter Sherlock's brilliant older brother joins Holmes on the hunt for a bunch of ruthless villains in a case of kidnapping.

The Adventure of the Naval Treaty Only Holmes can untangle a case that threatens the national security of England, and becomes a matter of life and death.

Join the uncanny and extraordinary Sherlock Holmes, and his friend and chronicler Dr. Watson, as they tackle dangerous crimes and untangle the most intricate mysteries.

AN AVON CAMELOT ORIGINAL • 78113 • $1.95
(ISBN: 0-380-78113-1)

Avon Camelot Books are available at your bookstore. Or, you may use Avon's special mail order service. Please state the title and code number and send with your check or money order for the full price, plus 50¢ per copy to cover postage and handling, to: AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Department, 224 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

Take an unforgettable trip down the Mississippi with these Catfish Bend Books.

Blow a Wild Bugle for Catfish Bend 53504 • $1.95
High Treason at Catfish Bend 53512 • $1.95
High Water at Catfish Bend 53470 • $1.95
The Owl Hoots Twice at Catfish Bend 53496 • $1.95
Seven Stars for Catfish Bend 53488 • $1.95
The Strange Invasion of Catfish Bend 53520 • $1.95

By Ben Lucien Burman

Introducing the delightful creatures of Catfish Bend—their home is a swamp, but their world is the mighty and magical Mississippi River. Whether they're facing the meanest outlaws in a Wild West showdown, or battling the raging Mississippi on a tiny raft, Ben Lucien Burman's spirited characters are never far from a rousing adventure!

". . . unique and universal in appeal, Catfish Bend is for everyone." BOSTON GLOBE

Avon Camelot Books

Avon Camelot Books are available at your bookstore. Or, you may use Avon's special mail order service. Please state the title and code number and send with your check or money order for the full price, plus 50¢ per copy to cover postage and handling, to: AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Department, 224 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

Tony believed in the world behind the magic door. But was it real or just a dream?

THE MAGIC DOOR

by Howard Fast
Illustrated by Bonnie B. Mettler

There is a door in the fence of Tony MacTavish Levy's back yard. It is not an ordinary door—for when Tony goes through it he travels hundreds of years into the past, into a Manhattan of long ago.

But when Tony tries to tell his teacher and parents about his adventures behind the door, they don't believe him. Not until he shows them how real his magic door really is.

An Avon Camelot Book 51193 • $1.95

Avon Camelot Books are available at your bookstore. Or, you may use Avon's special mail order service. Please state the title and code number and send with your check or money order for the full price, plus 50¢ per copy to cover postage and handling, to: AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Department, 224 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

WINNER OF THE NEWBERY AWARD

the Westing game

A Puzzle Mystery by Ellen Raskin

This wonderfully confounding whodunit involves an eccentric millionaire and his equally odd heirs. All sixteen of them are suspects in the murder of the very rich Mr. Westing, and only the one who solves the crime will inherit the fortune. "A supersharp mystery . . . in the Christie tradition . . . clever and very funny." KIRKUS REVIEWS

An Avon Camelot Book 49346 • $1.75

Also by Ellen Raskin

The Mysterious Disappearance of Leon (I Mean Noel) 51177 • $1.95

Avon Camelot Books are available at your bookstore. Or, you may use Avon's special mail order service. Please state the title and code number and send with your check or money order for the full price, plus 50¢ per copy to cover postage and handling, to: AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Department, 224 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

Chilling Suspense!

When Kipper and Larry set out to explore the ravine on the edge of town, Kipper thought it looked eerie. But there was nothing really mysterious about it until they met a man who said he was digging for Mohawk Indian artifacts....And then they saw a body!

Both boys knew that the Mohawks had never lived around Ludington, Michigan, and what's more when they climbed the ridge to get a good look at the body, it had disappeared! Something mighty peculiar was going on and the boys decided to get to the bottom of it.

"A baffling and scary story...something's crackling on every page." *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

AVON CAMELOT

PUBLISHED BY AVON BOOKS

008-012

0 00745 71001 00195

ISBN 0-380-00745-5

Printed in U.S.A.